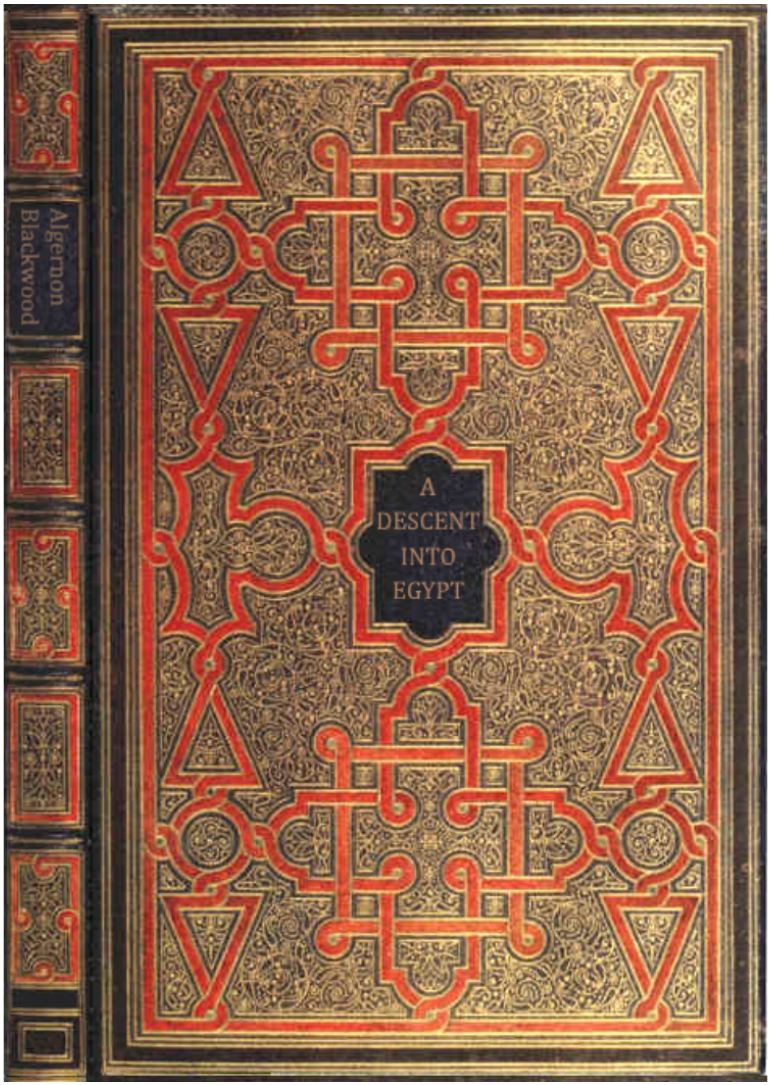
Algernon Blackwood
A DESCENT INTO EGYPT

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By
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'The Wings Of Horus,' 'The Wendigo,' etc.

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TO

M. S.-K.

I

He was an was an accomplished, versatile man whom some called brilliant. Behind his talents lay a wealth of material that right selection could have lifted into genuine distinction. He did too many things, however, to excel in one, for a restless curiosity kept him ever on the move. George Isley was an able man. His short career in diplomacy proved it; yet, when he abandoned this for travel and exploration, no one thought it a pity. He would do big things in any line. He was merely finding himself.

Among the rolling stones of humanity a few acquire moss of considerable value. They are not necessarily shiftless; they travel light; the comfortable pockets in the game of life that attract the majority are too small to retain them; they are in and out again in a moment. The world says, 'What a pity! They stick to nothing!' but the fact is that, like questing wild birds, they seek the nest they need. It is a question of values. They judge swiftly, change their line of flight, are gone, not even hearing the comment that they might have 'retired with a pension.'

And to this homeless, questing type George Isley certainly belonged. He was by no means shiftless. He merely sought with insatiable yearning that soft particular nest where he could settle down in permanently. And to an accompaniment of sighs and regrets from his friends he found it; he found it, however, not in the present, but by retiring from the world 'without a pension,' unclothed with honors and distinctions. He withdrew from the present and slipped softly back into a mighty Past where he belonged. Why; how; obeying what strange instincts—this remains unknown, deep secret of an inner life that found no resting-place in modern things. Such instincts are not disclosable in twentieth-century language, nor are the details of such a journey properly describable at all. Except by the few—poets, prophets, psychiatrists and the like—such experiences are dismissed with the neat museum label—'queer.'

So, equally, must the recorder of this experience share the honor of that little label—he who by chance witnessed certain external and

visible signs of this inner and spiritual journey. There remains, nevertheless, the amazing reality of the experience; and to the recorder alone was some clue of interpretation possible, perhaps, because in himself also lay the lure, though less imperative, of a similar journey. At any rate the interpretation may be offered to the handful who realize that trains and motors are not the only means of travel left to our progressive race.

In his younger days I knew George Isley intimately. I know him now. But the George Isley I knew of old, the arresting personality with whom I traveled, climbed, explored, is no longer with us. He is not here. He disappeared—gradually—into the past. There is no George Isley. And that such an individuality could vanish, while still his outer semblance walks the familiar streets, normal apparently, and not yet fifty in the number of his years, seems a tale, though difficult, well worth the telling. For I witnessed the slow submergence. It was very gradual. I cannot pretend to understand the entire significance of it. There was something questionable and sinister in the business that offered hints of astonishing possibilities. Were there a corps of spiritual police, the matter might be partially cleared up, but since none of the churches have yet organized anything effective of this sort, one can only fall back upon variants of the blessed 'Mesopotamia,' and whisper of derangement, and the like. Such labels, of course, explain as little as most other *clichés* in life. That well-groomed, soldierly figure strolling down Piccadilly, watching the Races, dining out—there is no derangement there. The face is not melancholy, the eye not wild; the gestures are quiet and the speech controlled. Yet the eye is empty, the face expressionless. Vacancy reigns there, provocative and significant. If not unduly noticeable, it is because the majority in life neither expect, nor offer, more.

At closer quarters you may think questioning things, or you may think—nothing; probably the latter. You may wonder why something continually expected does not make its appearance; and you may watch for the evidence of 'personality' the general presentment of the man has led you to expect. Disappointed, therefore, you may certainly be; but I defy you to discover the smallest hint of mental disorder, and of derangement or nervous affliction, absolutely nothing. Before long, perhaps, you may feel

you are talking with a dummy, some well-trained automaton, a nonentity devoid of spontaneous life; and afterwards you may find that memory fades rapidly away, as though no impression of any kind has really been made at all. All this, yes; but nothing pathological. A few may be stimulated by this startling discrepancy between promise and performance, but most, accustomed to accept face values, would say, ‘a pleasant fellow, but nothing in him much ...’ and an hour later forget him altogether.

For the truth is as you, perhaps, divined. You have been sitting beside no one, you have been talking to, looking at, listening to—no one. The intercourse has conveyed nothing that can waken human response in you, good, bad or indifferent. There is no George Isley. And the discovery, if you make it, will not even cause you to creep with the uncanniness of the experience, because the exterior is so wholly pleasing. George Isley to-day is a picture with no meaning in it that charms merely by the harmonious coloring of an inoffensive subject. He moves undiscovered in the little world of society to which he was born, secure in the groove first habit has made comfortably automatic for him. No one guesses; none, that is, but the few who knew him intimately in early life. And his wandering existence has scattered these; they have forgotten what he was. So perfect, indeed, is he in the manners of the commonplace fashionable man, that no woman in his ‘set’ is aware that he differs from the type she is accustomed to. He turns a compliment with the accepted language of her text-book, motors, golfs and gambles in the regulation manner of his particular world. He is an admirable, perfect automaton. He is nothing. He is a human shell.

II

The name of George Isley had been before the public for some years when, after a considerable interval, we met again in a hotel in Egypt, I for my health, he for I knew not what—at first. But I soon discovered: archeology and excavation had taken hold of him, though he had gone so quietly about it that no one seemed to have heard. I was not sure that he was glad to see me, for he had first withdrawn, annoyed, it seemed, at being discovered, but later, as though after consideration, had made tentative advances. He welcomed me with a curious gesture of the entire body that seemed to shake himself free from something that had made him forget my identity. There was pathos somewhere in his attitude, almost as though he asked for sympathy. 'I've been out here, off and on, for the last three years,' he told me, after describing something of what he had been doing. 'I find it the most repaying hobby in the world. It leads to a reconstruction—an imaginative reconstruction, of course, I mean—of an enormous thing the world had entirely lost. A very gorgeous, stimulating hobby, believe me, and a very entic—' he quickly changed the word—'exacting one indeed.'

I remember looking him up and down with astonishment. There was a change in him, a lack; a note was missing in his enthusiasm, a color in the voice, a quality in his manner. The ingredients were not mixed quite as of old. I did not bother him with questions, but I noted thus at the very first a subtle alteration. Another facet of the man presented itself. Something that had been independent and aggressive was replaced by a certain emptiness that invited sympathy. Even in his physical appearance the change was manifested—this odd suggestion of lessening. I looked again more closely. Lessening was the word. He had somehow dwindled. It was startling, vaguely unpleasant too.

The entire subject, as usual, was at his finger-tips; he knew all the important men; and had spent money freely on his hobby. I laughed, reminding him of his remark that Egypt had no attractions for him, owing to the organized advertisement of its somewhat theatrical charms. Admitting his error with a gesture, he brushed the objection easily aside. His manner, and a certain glow that rose

about his atmosphere as he answered, increased my first astonishment. His voice was significant and suggestive. ‘Come out with me,’ he said in a low tone, ‘and see how little the tourists matter, how inappreciable the excavation is compared to what remains to be done, how gigantic’—he emphasized the word impressively—‘the scope for discovery remains.’ He made a movement with his head and shoulders that conveyed a sense of the prodigious, for he was of massive build, his cast of features stern, and his eyes, set deep into the face, shone past me with a sombre gleam in them I did not quite account for. It was the voice, however, that brought the mystery in. It vibrated somewhere below the actual sound of it. ‘Egypt,’ he continued—and so gravely that at first I made the mistake of thinking he chose the curious words on purpose to produce a theatrical effect—‘that has enriched her blood with the pageant of so many civilizations, that has devoured Persians, Greeks and Romans, Saracens and Mamelukes, a dozen conquests and invasions besides,—what can mere tourists or explorers matter to her? The excavators scratch their skin and dig up mummies; and as for tourists!’—he laughed contemptuously —‘flies that settle for a moment on her covered face, to vanish at the first signs of heat! Egypt is not even aware of them. The real Egypt lies underground in darkness. Tourists must have light, to be seen as well as to see. And the diggers——!’

He paused, smiling with something between pity and contempt I did not quite appreciate, for, personally, I felt a great respect for the tireless excavators. And then he added, with a touch of feeling in his tone as though he had a grievance against them, and had not also ‘dug’ himself, ‘Men who uncover the dead, restore the temples, and reconstruct a skeleton, thinking they have read its beating heart....’ He shrugged his great shoulders, and the rest of the sentence may have been but the protest of a man in defense of his own hobby, but that there seemed an undue earnestness and gravity about it that made me wonder more than ever. He went on to speak of the strangeness of the land as a mere ribbon of vegetation along the ancient river, the rest all ruins, desert, sun-drenched wilderness of death, yet so breakingly alive with wonder, power and a certain disquieting sense of deathlessness. There seemed, for him, a revelation of unusual spiritual kind in this land where the Past survived so potently. He spoke almost as though it obliterated the

Present.

Indeed, the hint of something solemn behind his words made it difficult for me to keep up the conversation, and the pause that presently came I filled in with some word of questioning surprise, which yet, I think, was chiefly in concurrence. I was aware of some big belief in him, some enveloping emotion that escaped my grasp. Yet, though I did not understand, his great mood swept me.... His voice lowered, then, as he went on to mention temples, tombs and deities, details of his own discoveries and of their effect upon him, but to this I listened with half an ear, because in the unusual language he had first made use of I detected this other thing that stirred my curiosity more—stirred it uncomfortably.

'Then the spell,' I asked, remembering the effect of Egypt upon myself two years before, 'has worked upon you as upon most others, only with greater power?'

He looked hard at me a moment, signs of trouble showing themselves faintly in his rugged, interesting face. I think he wanted to say more than he could bring himself to confess. He hesitated.

'I'm only glad,' he replied after a pause, 'it didn't get hold of me earlier in life. It would have absorbed me. I should have lost all other interests. Now,'—that curious look of helplessness, of asking sympathy, flitted like a shadow through his eyes—'now that I'm on the decline ... it matters less.'

On the decline! I cannot imagine by what blundering I missed this chance he never offered again; somehow or other the singular phrase passed unnoticed at the moment, and only came upon me with its full significance later when it was too awkward to refer to it. He tested my readiness to help, to sympathize, to share his inner life. I missed the clue. For, at the moment, a more practical consideration interested me in his language. Being of those who regretted that he had not excelled by devoting his powers to a single object, I shrugged my shoulders. He caught my meaning instantly. Oh, he was glad to talk. He felt the possibility of my sympathy underneath, I think.

'No, no, you take me wrongly there,' he said with gravity. 'What I

mean—and I ought to know if any one does!—is that while most countries give, others take away. Egypt changes you. No one can live here and remain exactly what he was before.'

This puzzled me. It startled, too, again. His manner was so earnest. 'And Egypt, you mean, is one of the countries that take away?' I asked. The strange idea unsettled my thoughts a little.

'First takes away from you,' he replied, 'but in the end takes *you* away. Some lands enrich you,' he went on, seeing that I listened, 'while others impoverish. From India, Greece, Italy, all ancient lands, you return with memories you can use. From Egypt you return with—nothing. Its splendor stupefies; it's useless. There is a change in your inmost being, an emptiness, an unaccountable yearning, but you find nothing that can fill the lack you're conscious of. Nothing comes to replace what has gone. You have been drained.'

I stared; but I nodded a general acquiescence. Of a sensitive, artistic temperament this was certainly true, though by no means the superficial and generally accepted verdict. The majority imagine that Egypt has filled them to the brim. I took his deeper reading of the facts. I was aware of an odd fascination in his idea.

'Modern Egypt,' he continued, 'is, after all, but a trick of civilization,' and there was a kind of breathlessness in his measured tone, 'but ancient Egypt lies waiting, hiding, underneath. Though dead, she is amazingly alive. And you feel her touching you. She takes from you. She enriches herself. You return from Egypt—less than you were before.'

What came over my mind is hard to say. Some touch of visionary imagination burned its flaming path across my mind. I thought of some old Grecian hero speaking of his delicious battle with the gods—battle in which he knew he must be worsted, but yet in which he delighted because at death his spirit would join their glorious company beyond this world. I was aware, that is to say, of resignation as well as resistance in him. He already felt the effortless peace which follows upon long, unequal battling, as of a man who has fought the rapids with a strain beyond his strength, then sinks back and goes with the awful mass of water smoothly

and indifferently—over the quiet fall.

Yet, it was not so much his words which clothed picturesquely an undeniable truth, as the force of conviction that drove behind them, shrouding my mind with mystery and darkness. His eyes, so steadily holding mine, were lit, I admit, yet they were calm and sane as those of a doctor discussing the symptoms of that daily battle to which we all finally succumb. This analogy occurred to me.

'There *is*'—I stammered a little, faltering in my speech—'an incalculable element in the country ... somewhere, I confess. You put it—rather strongly, though, don't you?'

He answered quietly, moving his eyes from my face towards the window that framed the serene and exquisite sky towards the Nile.

'The real, invisible Egypt,' he murmured, 'I do find rather—strong. I find it difficult to deal with. You see,' and he turned towards me, smiling like a tired child, 'I think the truth is that Egypt deals with me.'

'It draws——' I began, then started as he interrupted me at once.

'Into the Past.' He uttered the little word in a way beyond me to describe. There came a flood of glory with it, a sense of peace and beauty, of battles over and of rest attained. No saint could have brimmed 'Heaven' with as much passionately enticing meaning. He went willingly, prolonging the struggle merely to enjoy the greater relief and joy of the consummation.

For again he spoke as though a struggle were in progress in his being. I got the impression that he somewhere wanted help. I understood the pathetic quality I had vaguely discerned already. His character naturally was so strong and independent. It now seemed weaker, as though certain fibers had been drawn out. And I understood then that the spell of Egypt, so lightly chattered about in its sensational aspect, so rarely known in its naked power, the nameless, creeping influence that begins deep below the surface and thence sends delicate tendrils outwards, was in his blood. I, in my untaught ignorance, had felt it too; it is undeniable; one is aware of unaccountable, queer things in Egypt; even the utterly prosaic feel

them. Dead Egypt is marvelously alive....

I glanced past him out of the big windows where the desert glimmered in its featureless expanse of yellow leagues, two monstrous pyramids signaling from across the Nile, and for a moment—inexplicably, it seemed to me afterwards—I lost sight of my companion's stalwart figure that was yet so close before my eyes. He had risen from his chair; he was standing near me; yet my sight missed him altogether. Something, dim as a shadow, faint as a breath of air, rose up and bore my thoughts away, obliterating vision too. I forgot for a moment who I was; identity slipped from me. Thought, sight, feeling, all sank away into the emptiness of those sun-baked sands, sank, as it were, into nothingness, caught away from the Present, enticed, absorbed.... And when I looked back again to answer him, or rather to ask what his curious words could mean—he was no longer there. More than surprised—for there was something of shock in the disappearance—I turned to search. I had not seen him go. He had stolen from my side so softly, slipped away silently, mysteriously, and—so easily. I remember that a faint shiver ran down my back as I realized that I was alone.

Was it that, momentarily, I had caught a reflex of his state of mind? Had my sympathy induced in myself an echo of what he experienced in full—a going backwards, a loss of present vigor, the enticing, subtle draw of those immeasurable sands that hide the living dead from the interruptions of the careless living...?

I sat down to reflect and, incidentally, to watch the magnificence of the sunset; and the thing he had said returned upon me with insistent power, ringing like distant bells within my mind. His talk of the tombs and temples passed, but this remained. It stimulated oddly. His talk, I remembered, had always excited curiosity in this way. Some countries give, while others take away. What did he mean precisely? What had Egypt taken away from him? And I realized more definitely that something in him was missing, something he possessed in former years that was now no longer there. He had grown shadowy already in my thoughts. The mind searched keenly, but in vain ... and after some time I left my chair and moved over to another window, aware that a vague discomfort stirred within me that involved uneasiness—for him. I felt pity. But

behind the pity was an eager, absorbing curiosity as well. He seemed receding curiously into misty distance, and the strong desire leaped in me to overtake, to travel with him into some vanished splendor that he had rediscovered. The feeling was a most remarkable one, for it included yearning—the yearning for some nameless, forgotten loveliness the world has lost. It was in me too.

At the approach of twilight the mind loves to harbor shadows. The room, empty of guests, was dark behind me; darkness, too, was creeping across the desert like a veil, deepening the serenity of its grim, unfeatured face. It turned pale with distance; the whole great sheet of it went rustling into night. The first stars peeped and twinkled, hanging loosely in the air as though they could be plucked like golden berries; and the sun was already below the Libyan horizon, where gold and crimson faded through violet into blue. I stood watching this mysterious Egyptian dusk, while an eerie glamor seemed to bring the incredible within uneasy reach of the half-faltering senses.... And suddenly the truth dropped into me. Over George Isley, over his mind and energies, over his thoughts and over his emotions too, a kind of darkness was also slowly creeping. Something in him had dimmed, yet not with age; it had gone out. Some inner night, stealing over the Present, obliterated it. And yet he looked towards the dawn. Like the Egyptian monuments his eyes turned—eastwards.

And so it came to me that what he had lost was personal ambition. He was glad, he said, that these Egyptian studies had not caught him earlier in life; the language he made use of was peculiar: 'Now I am on the decline it matters less.' A slight foundation, no doubt, to build conviction on, and yet I felt sure that I was partly right. He was fascinated, but fascinated against his will. The Present in him battled against the Past. Still fighting, he had yet lost hope. The desire *not* to change was now no longer in him....

I turned away from the window so as not to see that grey, encroaching desert, for the discovery produced a certain agitation in me. Egypt seemed suddenly a living entity of enormous power. She stirred about me. She was stirring now. This flat and motionless land pretending it had no movement, was actually busy with a million gestures that came creeping round the heart. She was

reducing him. Already from the complex texture of his personality she had drawn one vital thread that in its relation to the general woof was of central importance—ambition. The mind chose the simile; but in my heart where thought fluttered in singular distress, another suggested itself as truer. ‘Thread’ changed to ‘artery.’ I turned quickly and went up to my room where I could be alone. The idea was somewhere ghastly.

III

Yet, while dressing for dinner, the idea exfoliated as only a living thing exfoliates. I saw in George Isley this great question mark that had not been there formerly. All have, of course, some question mark, and carry it about, though with most it rarely becomes visible until the end. With him it was plainly visible in his atmosphere at the hey-day of his life. He wore it like a fine curved scimitar above his head. So full of life, he yet seemed willingly dead. For, though imagination sought every possible explanation, I got no further than the somewhat negative result—that a certain energy, wholly unconnected with mere physical health, had been withdrawn. It was more than ambition, I think, for it included intention, desire, self-confidence as well. It was life itself. He was no longer in the Present. He was no longer *here*.

'Some countries give while others take away.... I find Egypt difficult to deal with. I find it ...' and then that simple, uncomplex adjective —'strong.' In memory and experience the entire globe was mapped for him; it remained for Egypt, then, to teach him this marvelous new thing. But not Egypt of to-day; it was vanished Egypt that had robbed him of his strength. He had described it as underground, hidden, waiting.... I was again aware of a faint shuddering—as though something crept secretly from my inmost heart to share the experience with him, and as though my sympathy involved a willing consent that this should be so. With sympathy there must always be a shedding of the personal self; each time I felt this sympathy, it seemed that something left me. I thought in circles, arriving at no definite point where I could rest and say 'that's it; I understand.' The giving attitude of a country was easily comprehensible; but this idea of robbery, of deprivation baffled me. An obscure alarm took hold of me—for myself as well as for him.

At dinner, where he invited me to his table, the impression passed off a good deal, however, and I convicted myself of a woman's exaggeration; yet, as we talked of many a day's adventure together in other lands, it struck me that we oddly left the present out. We ignored to-day. His thoughts, as it were, went most easily backwards. And each adventure led, as by its own natural weight

and impetus, towards one thing—the enormous glory of a vanished age. Ancient Egypt was 'home' in this mysterious game life played with death. The specific gravity of his being, to say nothing for the moment of my own, had shifted lower, farther off, backwards and below, or as he put it—underground. The sinking sensation I experienced was of a literal kind....

And so I found myself wondering what had led him to this particular hotel. I had come out with an affected organ the specialist promised me would heal in the marvelous air of Helouan, but it was queer that my companion also should have chosen it. Its *clientèle* was mostly invalid, German and Russian invalid at that. The Management set its face against the lighter, gayer side of life that hotels in Egypt usually encourage eagerly. It was a true rest-house, a place of repose and leisure, a place where one could remain undiscovered and unknown. No English patronized it. One might easily—the idea came unbidden, suddenly—hide in it.

'Then you're doing nothing just now,' I asked, 'in the way of digging? No big expeditions or excavating at the moment?'

'I'm recuperating,' he answered carelessly. 'I've have had two years up at the Valley of the Kings, and overdid it rather. But I'm by way of working at a little thing near here across the Nile.' And he pointed in the direction of Sakkhâra, where the huge Memphian cemetery stretches underground from the Dachûr Pyramids to the Gizeh monsters, four miles lower down. 'There's a matter of a hundred years in that alone!'

'You must have accumulated a mass of interesting material. I suppose later you'll make use of it—a book or——'

His expression stopped me—that strange look in the eyes that had stirred my first uneasiness. It was as if something struggled up a moment, looked bleakly out upon the present, then sank away again.

'More,' he answered listlessly, 'than I can ever use. It's much more likely to use me.' He said it hurriedly, looking over his shoulder as though some one might be listening, then smiled significantly, bringing his eyes back upon my own again. I told him that he was

far too modest. ‘If all the excavators thought like that,’ I added, ‘we ignorant ones should suffer.’ I laughed, but the laughter was only on my lips.

He shook his head indifferently. ‘They do their best; they do wonders,’ he replied, making an indescribable gesture as though he withdrew willingly from the topic altogether, yet could not quite achieve it. ‘I know their books; I know the writers too—of various nationalities.’ He paused a moment, and his eyes turned grave. ‘I cannot understand quite—how they do it,’ he added half below his breath.

‘The labor, you mean? The strain of the climate, and so forth?’ I said this purposely, for I knew quite well he meant another thing. The way he looked into my face, however, disturbed me so that I believe I visibly started. Something very deep in me sat up alertly listening, almost on guard.

‘I mean,’ he replied, ‘that they must have uncommon powers of resistance.’

There! He had used the very word that had been hiding in me! ‘It puzzles me,’ he went on, ‘for, with one exception, they are not unusual men. In the way of gifts—oh yes. It’s in the way of resistance and protection that I mean. Self-protection,’ he added with emphasis.

It was the way he said ‘resistance’ and ‘self-protection’ that sent a touch of cold through me. I learned later that he himself had made surprising discoveries in these two years, penetrating closer to the secret life of ancient sacerdotal Egypt than any of his predecessors or co-laborers—then, inexplicably, had ceased. But this was told to me afterwards and by others. At the moment I was only conscious of this odd embarrassment. I did not understand, yet felt that he touched upon something intimately personal to himself. He paused, expecting me to speak.

‘Egypt, perhaps, merely pours through them,’ I ventured. ‘They give out mechanically, hardly realizing how much they give. They report facts devoid of interpretation. Whereas with you it’s the actual spirit of the past that is discovered and laid bare. You live it. You feel old

Egypt and disclose her. That divining faculty was always yours—uncannily, I used to think.'

The flash of his sombre eyes betrayed that my aim was singularly good. It seemed a third had silently joined our little table in the corner. Something intruded, evoked by the power of what our conversation skirted but ever left unmentioned. It was huge and shadowy; it was also watchful. Egypt came gliding, floating up beside us. I saw her reflected in his face and gaze. The desert slipped in through walls and ceiling, rising from beneath our feet, settling about us, listening, peering, waiting. The strange obsession was sudden and complete. The gigantic scale of her swam in among the very pillars, arches, and windows of that modern dining-room. I felt against my skin the touch of chilly air that sunlight never reaches, stealing from beneath the granite monoliths. Behind it came the stifling breath of the heated tombs, of the Serapeum, of the chambers and corridors in the pyramids. There was a rustling as of myriad footsteps far away, and as of sand the busy winds go shifting through the ages. And in startling contrast to this impression of prodigious size, Isley himself wore suddenly an air of strangely dwindling. For a second he shrank visibly before my very eyes. He was receding. His outline seemed to retreat and lessen, as though he stood to the waist in what appeared like flowing mist, only his head and shoulders still above the ground. Far, far away I saw him.

It was a vivid inner picture that I somehow transferred objectively. It was a dramatized sensation, of course. His former phrase 'now that I am declining' flashed back upon me with sharp discomfort. Again, perhaps, his state of mind was reflected into me by some emotional telepathy. I waited, conscious of an almost sensible oppression that would not lift. It seemed an age before he spoke, and when he did there was the tremor of feeling in his voice he sought nevertheless to repress. I kept my eyes on the table for some reason. But I listened intently.

'It's you that have the divining faculty, not I,' he said, an odd note of distance even in his tone, yet a resonance as though it rose up between reverberating walls. 'There *is*, I believe, something here that resents too close inquiry, or rather that resists discovery—

almost—takes offense.'

I looked up quickly, then looked down again. It was such a startling thing to hear on the lips of a modern Englishman. He spoke lightly, but the expression of his face belied the careless tone. There was no mockery in those earnest eyes, and in the hushed voice was a little creeping sound that gave me once again the touch of goose-flesh. The only word I can find is 'subterranean': all that was mental in him had sunk, so that he seemed speaking underground, head and shoulders alone visible. The effect was almost ghastly.

'Such extraordinary obstacles are put in one's way,' he went on, 'when the prying gets too close to the—reality; physical, external obstacles, I mean. Either that, or—the mind loses its assimilative faculties. One or other happens—' his voice died down into a whisper—'and discovery ceases of its own accord.'

The same minute, then, he suddenly raised himself like a man emerging from a tomb; he leaned across the table; he made an effort of some violent internal kind, on the verge, I fully believe, of a pregnant personal statement. There was confession in his attitude; I think he was about to speak of his work at Thebes and the reason for its abrupt cessation. For I had the feeling of one about to hear a weighty secret, the responsibility unwelcome. This uncomfortable emotion rose in me, as I raised my eyes to his somewhat unwillingly, only to find that I was wholly at fault. It was not me he was looking at. He was staring past me in the direction of the wide, unshuttered windows. The expression of yearning was visible in his eyes again. Something had stopped his utterance.

And instinctively I turned and saw what he saw. So far as external details were concerned, at least, I saw it.

Across the glare and glitter of the uncompromising modern dining-room, past crowded tables, and over the heads of Germans feeding unpicturesquely, I saw—the moon. Her reddish disc, hanging unreal and enormous, lifted the spread sheet of desert till it floated off the surface of the world. The great window faced the east, where the Arabian desert breaks into a ruin of gorges, cliffs, and flat-topped ridges; it looked unfriendly, ominous, with danger in it; unlike the serener sand-dunes of the Libyan desert, there lay both menace and

seduction behind its flood of shadows. And the moonlight emphasized this aspect: its ghostly desolation, its cruelty, its bleak hostility, turning it murderous. For no river sweetens this Arabian desert; instead of sandy softness, it has fangs of limestone rock, sharp and aggressive. Across it, just visible in the moonlight as a thread of paler grey, the old camel-trail to Suez beckoned faintly. And it was this that he was looking at so intently.

It was, I know, a theatrical stage-like glimpse, yet in it a seductiveness most potent. 'Come out,' it seemed to whisper, 'and taste my awful beauty. Come out and lose yourself, and die. Come out and follow my moonlit trail into the Past ... where there is peace and immobility and silence. My kingdom is unchanging underground. Come down, come softly, come through sandy corridors below this tinsel of your modern world. Come back, come down into my golden past....'

A poignant desire stole through my heart on moonlit feet; I was personally conscious of a keen yearning to slip away in unresisting obedience. For it was uncommonly impressive, this sudden, haunting glimpse of the world outside. The hairy foreigners, uncouthly garbed, all busily eating in full electric light, provided a sensational contrast of emphatically distressing kind. A touch of what is called unearthly hovered about that distance through the window. There was weirdness in it. Egypt looked in upon us. Egypt watched and listened, beckoning through the moonlit windows of the heart to come and find her. Mind and imagination might flounder as they pleased, but something of this kind happened undeniably, whether expression in language fails to hold the truth or not. And George Isley, aware of being seen, looked straight into the awful visage—fascinated.

Over the bronze of his skin there stole a shade of grey. My own feeling of enticement grew—the desire to go out into the moonlight, to leave my kind and wander blindly through the desert, to see the gorges in their shining silver, and taste the keenness of the cool, sharp air. Further than this with me it did not go, but that my companion felt the bigger, deeper draw behind this surface glamor, I have no reasonable doubt. For a moment, indeed, I thought he meant to leave the table; he had half risen in his chair; it seemed he

struggled and resisted—and then his big frame subsided again; he sat back; he looked, in the attitude his body took, less impressive, smaller, actually shrunken into the proportions of some minuter scale. It was as though something in that second had been drawn out of him, decreasing even his physical appearance. The voice, when he spoke presently with a touch of resignation, held a lifeless quality as though deprived of virile timbre.

'It's always there,' he whispered, half collapsing back into his chair, 'it's always watching, waiting, listening. Almost like a monster of the fables, isn't it? It makes no movement of its own, you see. It's far too strong for that. It just hangs there, half in the air and half upon the earth—a gigantic web. Its prey flies into it. That's Egypt all over. D'you feel like that too, or does it seem to you just imaginative rubbish? To me it seems that she just waits her time; she gets you quicker that way; in the end you're bound to go.'

'There's power certainly,' I said after a moment's pause to collect my wits, my distress increased by the morbidness of his simile. 'For some minds there may be a kind of terror too—for weak temperaments that are all imagination.' My thoughts were scattered, and I could not readily find good words. 'There is startling grandeur in a sight like that, for instance,' and I pointed to the window. 'You feel drawn—as if you simply *had* to go.' My mind still buzzed with his curious words, 'In the end you're bound to go.' It betrayed his heart and soul. 'I suppose a fly does feel drawn,' I added, 'or a moth to the destroying flame. Or is it just unconscious on their part?'

He jerked his big head significantly. 'Well, well,' he answered, 'but the fly isn't necessarily weak, or the moth misguided. Over-adventurous, perhaps, yet both obedient to the laws of their respective beings. They get warnings too—only, when the moth wants to know too much, the fire stops it. Both flame and spider enrich themselves by understanding the natures of their prey; and fly and moth return again and again until this is accomplished.'

Yet George Isley was as sane as the head waiter who, noticing our interest in the window, came up just then and enquired whether we felt a draught and would prefer it closed. Isley, I realized, was struggling to express a passionate state of soul for which, owing to

its rarity, no adequate expression lies at hand. There is a language of the mind, but there is none as yet of the spirit. I felt ill at ease. All this was so foreign to the wholesome, strenuous personality of the man as I remembered it.

'But, my dear fellow,' I stammered, 'aren't you giving poor old Egypt a bad name she hardly deserves? I feel only the amazing strength and beauty of it; awe, if you like, but none of this resentment you so mysteriously hint at.'

'You understand, for all that,' he answered quietly; and again he seemed on the verge of some significant confession that might ease his soul. My uncomfortable emotion grew. Certainly he was at high pressure somewhere. 'And, if necessary, you could help. Your sympathy, I mean, *is* a help already.' He said it half to himself and in a suddenly lowered tone again.

'A help!' I gasped. 'My sympathy! Of course, if——'

'A witness,' he murmured, not looking at me, 'some one who understands, yet does not think me mad.'

There was such appeal in his voice that I felt ready and eager to do anything to help him. Our eyes met, and my own tried to express this willingness in me; but what I said I hardly know, for a cloud of confusion was on my mind, and my speech went fumbling like a schoolboy's. I was more than disconcerted. Through this bewilderment, then, I just caught the tail-end of another sentence in which the words 'relief it is to have ... some one to hold to ... when the disappearance comes ...' sounded like voices heard in dream. But I missed the complete phrase and shrank from asking him to repeat it.

Some sympathetic answer struggled to my lips, though what it was I know not. The thing I murmured, however, seemed apparently well chosen. He leaned across and laid his big hand a moment on my own with eloquent pressure. It was cold as ice. A look of gratitude passed over his sunburned features. He sighed. And we left the table then and passed into the inner smoking-room for coffee—a room whose windows gave upon columned terraces that allowed no view of the encircling desert. He led the conversation into channels less

personal and, thank heaven, less intensely emotional and mysterious. What we talked about I now forget; it was interesting but in another key altogether. His old charm and power worked; the respect I had always felt for his character and gifts returned in force, but it was the pity I now experienced that remained chiefly in my mind. For this change in him became more and more noticeable. He was less impressive, less convincing, less suggestive. His talk, though so knowledgeable, lacked that spiritual quality that drives home. He was uncannily less *real*. And I went up to bed, uneasy and disturbed. 'It is not age,' I said to myself, 'and assuredly it is not death he fears, although he spoke of disappearance. It is mental—in the deepest sense. It is what religious people would call soul. Something is happening to his soul.'

IV

And this word ‘soul’ remained with me to the end. Egypt was taking his soul away into the Past. What was of value in him went willingly; the rest, some lesser aspect of his mind and character, resisted, holding to the present. A struggle, therefore, was involved. But this was being gradually obliterated too.

How I arrived gaily at this monstrous conclusion seems to me now a mystery; but the truth is that from a conversation one brings away a general idea that is larger than the words actually heard and spoken. I have reported, naturally, but a fragment of what passed between us in language, and of what was suggested—by gesture, expression, silence—merely perhaps a hint. I can only assert that this troubling verdict remained a conviction in my mind. It came upstairs with me; it watched and listened by my side. That mysterious Third evoked in our conversation was bigger than either of us separately; it might be called the spirit of ancient Egypt, or it might be called with equal generalization, the Past. This Third, at any rate, stood by me, whispering this astounding thing. I went out on to my little balcony to smoke a pipe and enjoy the comforting presence of the stars before turning in. It came out with me. It was everywhere. I heard the barking of dogs, the monotonous beating of a distant drum towards Bedraschien, the sing-song voices of the natives in their booths and down the dim-lit streets. I was aware of this invisible Third behind all these familiar sounds. The enormous night-sky, drowned in stars, conveyed it too. It was in the breath of chilly wind that whispered round the walls, and it brooded everywhere above the sleepless desert. I was alone as little as though George Isley stood beside me in person—and at that moment a moving figure caught my eye below. My window was on the sixth story, but there was no mistaking the tall and soldierly bearing of the man who was strolling past the hotel. George Isley was going slowly out into the desert.

There was actually nothing unusual in the sight. It was only ten o’clock; but for doctor’s orders I might have been doing the same myself. Yet, as I leaned over the dizzy ledge and watched him, a chill struck through me, and a feeling nothing could justify, nor

pages of writing describe, rose up and mastered me. His words at dinner came back with curious force. Egypt lay round him, motionless, a vast grey web. His feet were caught in it. It quivered. The silvery meshes in the moonlight announced the fact from Memphis up to Thebes, across the Nile, from underground Sakkhâra to the Valley of the Kings. A tremor ran over the entire desert, and again, as in the dining-room, the leagues of sand went rustling. It seemed to me that I caught him in the act of disappearing.

I realized in that moment the haunting power of this mysterious still atmosphere which is Egypt, and some magical emanation of its mighty past broke over me suddenly like a wave. Perhaps in that moment I felt what he himself felt; the withdrawing suction of the huge spent wave swept something out of me into the past with it. An indescribable yearning drew something living from my heart, something that longed with a kind of burning, searching sweetness for a glory of spiritual passion that was gone. The pain and happiness of it were more poignant than may be told, and my present personality—some vital portion of it, at any rate—wilted before the power of its enticement.

I stood there, motionless as stone, and stared. Erect and steady, knowing resistance vain, eager to go yet striving to remain, and half with an air of floating off the ground, he went towards the pale grey thread which was the track to Suez and the far Red Sea. There came upon me this strange, deep sense of pity, pathos, sympathy that was beyond all explanation, and mysterious as a pain in dreams. For a sense of his awful loneliness stole into me, a loneliness nothing on this earth could possibly relieve. Robbed of the Present, he sought this chimera of his soul, an unreal Past. Not even the calm majesty of this exquisite Egyptian night could soothe the dream away; the peace and silence were marvelous, the sweet perfume of the desert air intoxicating; but all these intensified it only.

And though at a loss to explain my own emotion, its poignancy was so real that a sigh escaped me and I felt that tears lay not too far away. I watched him, yet felt I had no right to watch. Softly I drew back from the window with the sensation of eavesdropping upon his privacy; but before I did so I had seen his outline melt away into

the dim world of sand that began at the very walls of the hotel. He wore a cloak of green that reached down almost to his heels, and its color blended with the silvery surface of the desert's dark sea-tint. This sheen first draped and then concealed him. It covered him with a fold of its mysterious garment that, without seam or binding, veiled Egypt for a thousand leagues. The desert took him. Egypt caught him in her web. He was gone.

Sleep for me just then seemed out of the question. The change in *him* made me feel less sure of myself. To see him thus invertebrate shocked me. I was aware that I had nerves.

For a long time I sat smoking by the window, my body weary, but my imagination irritatingly stimulated. The big sign-lights of the hotel went out; window after window closed below me; the electric standards in the streets were already extinguished; and Helouan looked like a child's white blocks scattered in ruin upon the nursery carpet. It seemed so wee upon the vast expanse. It lay in a twinkling pattern, like a cluster of glow-worms dropped into a negligible crease of the tremendous desert. It peeped up at the stars, a little frightened.

The night was very still. There hung an enormous brooding beauty everywhere, a hint of the sinister in it that only the brilliance of the blazing stars relieved. Nothing really slept. Grouped here and there at intervals about this dun-colored world stood the everlasting watchers in solemn, tireless guardianship—the soaring Pyramids, the Sphinx, the grim Colossi, the empty temples, the long-deserted tombs. The mind was aware of them, stationed like sentries through the night. 'This is Egypt; you are actually in Egypt,' whispered the silence. 'Eight thousand years of history lie fluttering outside your window. *She* lies there underground, sleepless, mighty, deathless, not to be trifled with. Beware! Or she will change you too!'

My imagination offered this hint: Egypt *is* difficult to realize. It remains outside the mind, a fabulous, half-legendary idea. So many enormous elements together refuse to be assimilated; the heart pauses, asking for time and breath; the senses reel a little; and in the end a mental torpor akin to stupefaction creeps upon the brain. With a sigh the struggle is abandoned and the mind surrenders to

Egypt on her own terms. Alone the diggers and archaeologists, confined to definite facts, offer successful resistance. My friend's use of the words 'resistance' and 'protection' became clearer to me. While logic halted, intuition fluttered round this clue to the solution of the influences at work. George Isley realized Egypt more than most—but as she had been.

And I recalled its first effect upon myself, and how my mind had been unable to cope with the memory of it afterwards. There had come to its summons a colossal medley, a gigantic, colored blur that merely bewildered. Only lesser points lodged comfortably in the heart. I saw a chaotic vision: sands drenched in dazzling light, vast granite aisles, stupendous figures that stared unblinking at the sun, a shining river and a shadowy desert, both endless as the sky, mountainous pyramids and gigantic monoliths, armies of heads, of paws, of faces—all set to a scale of size that was prodigious. The items stunned; the composite effect was too unwieldy to be grasped. Something that blazed with splendor rolled before the eyes, too close to be seen distinctly—at the same time very distant—unrealized.

Then, with the passing of the weeks, it slowly stirred to life. It had attacked unseen; its grip was quite tremendous; yet it could be neither told, nor painted, nor described. It flamed up unexpectedly—in the foggy London streets, at the Club, in the theater. A sound recalled the street-cries of the Arabs, a breath of scented air brought back the heated sand beyond the palm groves. Up rose the huge Egyptian glamor, transforming common things; it had lain buried all this time in deep recesses of the heart that are inaccessible to ordinary daily life. And there hid in it something of uneasiness that was inexplicable; awe, a hint of cold eternity, a touch of something unchanging and terrific, something sublime made lovely yet unearthly with shadowy time and distance. The melancholy of the Nile and the grandeur of a hundred battered temples dropped some unutterable beauty upon the heart. Up swept the desert air, the luminous pale shadows, the naked desolation that yet brims with sharp vitality. An Arab on his donkey tripped in color across the mind, melting off into tiny perspective, strangely vivid. A string of camels stood in silhouette against the crimson sky. Great winds, great blazing spaces, great solemn nights, great days of golden

splendor rose from the pavement or the theater-stall, and London, dim-lit England, the whole of modern life, indeed, seemed suddenly reduced to a paltry insignificance that produced an aching longing for the pageantry of those millions of vanished souls. Egypt rolled through the heart for a moment—and was gone.

I remembered that some such fantastic experience had been mine. Put it as one may, the fact remains that for certain temperaments Egypt can rob the Present of some thread of interest that was formerly there. The memory became for me an integral part of personality; something in me yearned for its curious and awful beauty. He who has drunk of the Nile shall return to drink of it again.... And if for myself this was possible, what might not happen to a character of George Isley's type? Some glimmer of comprehension came to me. The ancient, buried, hidden Egypt had cast her net about his soul. Grown shadowy in the Present, his life was being transferred into some golden, reconstructed Past, where it was real. Some countries give, while others take away. And George Isley was worth robbing....

Disturbed by these singular reflections, I moved away from the open window, closing it. But the closing did not exclude the presence of the Third. The biting night air followed me in. I drew the mosquito curtains round the bed, but the light I left still burning; and, lying there, I jotted down upon a scrap of paper this curious impression as best I could, only to find that it escaped easily between the words. Such visionary and spiritual perceptions are too elusive to be trapped in language. Reading it over after an interval of years, it is difficult to recall with what intense meaning, what uncanny emotion, I wrote those faded lines in pencil. Their rhetoric seems cheap, their content much exaggerated; yet at the time truth burned in every syllable. Egypt, which since time began has suffered robbery with violence at the hands of all the world, now takes her vengeance, choosing her individual prey. Her time has come. Behind a modern mask she lies in wait, intensely active, sure of her hidden power. Prostitute of dead empires, she lies now at peace beneath the same old stars, her loveliness unimpaired, bejeweled with the beaten gold of ages, her breasts uncovered, and her grand limbs flashing in the sun. Her shoulders of alabaster are lifted above the sand-drifts; she surveys the little figures of to-day.

She takes her choice....

That night I did not dream, but neither did the whole of me lie down in sleep. During the long dark hours I was aware of that picture endlessly repeating itself, the picture of George Isley stealing out into the moonlight desert. The night so swiftly dropped her hood about him; so mysteriously he merged into the unchanging thing which cloaks the past. It lifted. Some huge shadowy hand, gloved softly yet of granite, stretched over the leagues to take him. He disappeared.

They say the desert is motionless and has no gestures! That night I saw it moving, hurrying. It went tearing after him. You understand my meaning? No! Well, when excited it produces this strange impression, and the terrible moment is—when you surrender helplessly—you desire it shall swallow you. You let it come. George Isley spoke of a web. It is, at any rate, some central power that conceals itself behind the surface glamor folk call the spell of Egypt. Its home is not apparent. It dwells with ancient Egypt—underground. Behind the stillness of hot windless days, behind the peace of calm, gigantic nights, it lurks unrealized, monstrous and irresistible. My mind grasped it as little as the fact that our solar system with all its retinue of satellites and planets rushes annually many million miles towards a star in Hercules, while yet that constellation appears no closer than it did six thousand years ago. But the clue dropped into me. George Isley, with his entire retinue of thought and life and feeling, was being similarly drawn. And I, a minor satellite, had become aware of the horrifying pull. It was magnificent.... And I fell asleep on the crest of this enormous wave.

V

The next few days passed idly; weeks passed too, I think; hidden away in this cosmopolitan hotel we lived apart, unnoticed. There was the feeling that time went what pace it pleased, now fast, now slow, now standing still. The similarity of the brilliant days, set between wondrous dawns and sunsets, left the impression that it was really one long, endless day without divisions. The mind's machinery of measurement suffered dislocation. Time went backwards; dates were forgotten; the month, the time of year, the century itself went down into undifferentiated life.

The Present certainly slipped away curiously. Newspapers and politics became unimportant, news uninteresting, English life so remote as to be unreal, European affairs shadowy. The stream of life ran in another direction altogether—backwards. The names and faces of friends appeared through mist. People arrived as though dropped from the skies. They suddenly were there; one saw them in the dining-room, as though they had just slipped in from an outer world that once was real—somewhere. Of course, a steamer sailed four times a week, and the journey took five days, but these things were merely known, not realized. The fact that here it was summer, whereas over there winter reigned, helped to make the distance not quite thinkable. We looked at the desert and made plans. 'We will do this, we will do that; we must go there, we'll visit such and such a place ...' yet nothing happened. It always was to-morrow or yesterday, and we shared the discovery of Alice that there was no real 'to-day.' For our thinking made everything happen. That was enough. It *had* happened. It was the reality of dreams. Egypt was a dream-world that made the heart live backwards.

It came about, thus, that for the next few weeks I watched a fading life, myself alert and sympathetic, yet unable somehow to intrude and help. Noticing various little things by which George Isley betrayed the progress of the unequal struggle, I found my assistance negatived by the fact that I was in similar case myself. What he experienced in large and finally, I, too, experienced in little and for the moment. For I seemed also caught upon the fringe of the invisible web. My feelings were entangled sufficiently for me to

understand.... And the decline of his being was terrible to watch. His character went with it; I saw his talents fade, his personality dwindle, his very soul dissolve before the insidious and invading influence. He hardly struggled. I thought of those abominable insects that paralyze the motor systems of their victims and then devour them at their leisure—alive. The incredible adventure was literally true, but, being spiritual, may not be told in the terms of a detective story. This version must remain an individual rendering—an aspect of *one* possible version. All who know the real Egypt, that Egypt which has nothing to do with dams and Nationalists and the external welfare of the falaheen, will understand. The pilfering of her ancient dead she suffers still; she, in revenge, preys at her leisure on the living.

The occasions when he betrayed himself were ordinary enough; it was the glimpse they afforded of what was in progress beneath his calm exterior that made them interesting. Once, I remember, we had lunched together at Mena, and, after visiting certain excavations beyond the Gizeh pyramids, we made our way homewards by way of the Sphinx. It was dusk, and the main army of tourists had retired, though some few dozen sight-seers still moved about to the cries of donkey-boys and baksheesh. The vast head and shoulders suddenly emerged, riding undrowned above the sea of sand. Dark and monstrous in the fading light, it loomed, as ever, a being of non-human lineage; no amount of familiarity could depreciate its grandeur, its impressive setting, the lost expression of the countenance that is too huge to focus as a face. A thousand visits leave its power undiminished. It has intruded upon our earth from some uncommon world. George Isley and myself both turned aside to acknowledge the presence of this alien, uncomfortable thing. We did not linger, but we slackened pace. It was the obvious, inevitable thing to do. He pointed then, with a suddenness that made me start. He indicated the tourists standing round.

‘See,’ he said, in a lowered tone, ‘day and night you’ll always find a crowd obedient to that thing. But notice their behavior. People don’t do that before any other ruin in the world I’ve ever seen.’ He referred to the attempts of individuals to creep away alone and stare into the stupendous visage by themselves. At different points in the deep sandy basin were men and women, standing solitary,

lying, crouching, apart from the main company where the dragomen mouthed their exposition with impertinent glibness.

'The desire to be alone,' he went on, half to himself, as we paused a moment, 'the sense of worship which insists on privacy.'

It *was* significant, for no amount of advertising could dwarf the impressiveness of the inscrutable visage into whose eyes of stone the silent humans gazed. Not even the red-coat, standing inside one gigantic ear, could introduce the commonplace. But my companion's words let another thing into the spectacle, a less exalted thing, dropping a hint of horror about that sandy cup: It became easy, for a moment, to imagine these tourists worshiping—against their will; to picture the monster noticing that they were there; that it might slowly turn its awful head; that the sand might visibly trickle from a stirring paw; that, in a word, they might be taken—changed.

'Come,' he whispered in a dropping tone, interrupting my fancies as though he half divined them, 'it is getting late, and to be alone with the thing is intolerable to me just now. But you notice, don't you,' he added, as he took my arm to hurry me away, 'how little the tourists matter? Instead of injuring the effect, they increase it. It uses *them*.'

And again a slight sensation of chill, communicated possibly by his nervous touch, or possibly by his earnest way of saying these curious words, passed through me. Some part of me remained behind in that hollow trough of sand, prostrate before an immensity that symbolized the past. A curious, wild yearning caught me momentarily, an intense desire to understand exactly why that terror stood there, its actual meaning long ago to the hearts that set it waiting for the sun, what definite rôle it played, what souls it stirred and why, in that system of towering belief and faith whose indestructible emblem it still remained. The past stood grouped so solemnly about its menacing presentment. I was distinctly aware of this spiritual suction backwards that my companion yielded to so gladly, yet against his normal, modern self. For it made the past appear magnificently desirable, and loosened all the rivets of the present. It bodied forth three main ingredients of this deep Egyptian spell—size, mystery, and immobility.

Yet, to my relief, the cheaper aspect of this Egyptian glamor left him cold. He remained unmoved by the commonplace mysterious; he told no mummy stories, nor ever hinted at the supernatural quality that leaps to the mind of the majority. There was no play in him. The influence was grave and vital. And, although I knew he held strong views with regard to the impiety of disturbing the dead, he never in my hearing attached any possible revengeful character to the energy of an outraged past. The current tales of this description he ignored; they were for superstitious minds or children; the deities that claimed his soul were of a grander order altogether. He lived, if it may be so expressed, already in a world his heart had reconstructed or remembered; it drew him in another direction altogether; with the modern, sensational view of life his spirit held no traffic any longer; he was living backwards. I saw his figure receding mournfully, yet never sentimentally, into the spacious, golden atmosphere of recaptured days. The enormous soul of buried Egypt drew him down. The dwindling of his physical appearance was, of course, a mental interpretation of my own; but another, stranger interpretation of a spiritual kind moved parallel with it—marvelous and horrible. For, as he diminished outwardly and in his modern, present aspect, he grew within—gigantic. The size of Egypt entered into him. Huge proportions now began to accompany any presentment of his personality to my inner vision. He towered. These two qualities of the land already obsessed him—magnitude and immobility.

And that awe which modern life ignores contemptuously woke in my heart. I almost feared his presence at certain times. For one aspect of the Egyptian spell is explained by sheer size and bulk. Disdainful of mere speed to-day, the heart is still uncomfortable with magnitude; and in Egypt there is size that may easily appal, for every detail shunts it laboriously upon the mind. It elbows out the present. The desert's vastness is not made comprehensible by mileage, and the sources of the Nile are so distant that they exist less on the map than in the imagination. The effort to realize suffers paralysis; they might equally be in the moon or Saturn. The undecorated magnificence of the desert remains unknown, just as the proportions of pyramid and temple, of pylons and Colossi approach the edge of the mind yet never enter in. All stand outside, clothed in this prodigious measurement of the past. And the old

beliefs not only share this titanic effect upon the consciousness, but carry it stages further. The entire scale haunts with uncomfortable immensity, so that the majority run back with relief to the measurable details of a more manageable scale. Express trains, flying machines, Atlantic liners—these produce no unpleasant stretching of the faculties compared to the influence of the Karnak pylons, the pyramids, or the interior of the Serapeum.

Close behind this magnitude, moreover, steps the monstrous. It is revealed not in sand and stone alone, in queer effects of light and shadow, of glittering sunsets and of magical dusks, but in the very aspect of the bird and animal life. The heavy-headed buffaloes betray it equally with the vultures, the myriad kites, the grotesqueness of the mouthing camels. The rude, enormous scenery has it everywhere. There is nothing lyrical in this land of passionate mirages. Uncouth immensity notes the little human flittings. The days roll by in a tide of golden splendor; one goes helplessly with the flood; but it is an irresistible flood that sweeps backwards and below. The silent-footed natives in their colored robes move before a curtain, and behind that curtain dwells the soul of ancient Egypt —the Reality, as George Isley called it—watching, with sleepless eyes of grey infinity. Then, sometimes the curtain stirs and lifts an edge; an invisible hand creeps forth; the soul is touched. And some one disappears.

VI

The process of disintegration must have been at work a long time before I appeared upon the scene; the changes went forward with such rapidity.

It was his third year in Egypt, two of which had been spent without interruption in company with an Egyptologist named Moleson, in the neighborhood of Thebes. I soon discovered that this region was for him the center of attraction, or as he put it, of the web. Not Luxor, of course, nor the images of reconstructed Karnak; but that stretch of grim, forbidding mountains where royalty, earthly and spiritual, sought eternal peace for the physical remains. There, amid surroundings of superb desolation, great priests and mighty kings had thought themselves secure from sacrilegious touch. In caverns underground they kept their faithful tryst with centuries, guarded by the silence of magnificent gloom. There they waited, communing with passing ages in their sleep, till Ra, their glad divinity, should summon them to the fulfillment of their ancient dream. And there, in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, their dream was shattered, their lovely prophecies derided, and their glory dimmed by the impious desecration of the curious.

That George Isley and his companion had spent their time, not merely digging and deciphering like their practical confrères, but engaged in some strange experiments of recovery and reconstruction, was matter for open comment among the fraternity. That incredible things had happened there was the big story of two Egyptian seasons at least. I heard this later only—tales of utterly incredible kind, that the desolate vale of rock was seen repeopled on moonlit nights, that the smoke of unaccustomed fires rose to cap the flat-topped peaks, that the pageantry of some forgotten worship had been seen to issue from the openings of these hills, and that sounds of chanting, sonorous and marvelously sweet, had been heard to echo from those bleak, repellent precipices. The tales apparently were grossly exaggerated; wandering Bedouins brought them in; the guides and dragomen repeated them with mysterious additions; till they filtered down through the native servants in the hotels and reached the tourists with highly picturesque embroidery.

They reached the authorities too. The only accurate fact I gathered at the time, however, was that they had abruptly ceased. George Isley and Moleson, moreover, had parted company. And Moleson, I heard, was the originator of the business. He was, at this time, unknown to me; his arresting book on 'A Modern Reconstruction of Sun-worship in Ancient Egypt' being my only link with his unusual mind. Apparently he regarded the sun as the deity of the scientific religion of the future which would replace the various anthropomorphic gods of childish creeds. He discussed the possibility of the zodiacal signs being some kind of Celestial Intelligences. Belief blazed on every page. Men's life is heat, derived solely from the sun, and men were, therefore, part of the sun in the sense that a Christian is part of his personal deity. And absorption was the end. His description of 'sun-worship ceremonials' conveyed an amazing reality and beauty. This singular book, however, was all I knew of him until he came to visit us in Helouan, though I easily discerned that his influence somehow was the original cause of the change in my companion.

At Thebes, then, was the active center of the influence that drew my friend away from modern things. It was there, I easily guessed, that 'obstacles' had been placed in the way of these men's too close enquiry. In that haunted and oppressive valley, where profane and reverent come to actual grips, where modern curiosity is most busily organized, and even tourists are aware of a masked hostility that dogs the prying of the least imaginative mind—there, in the neighborhood of the hundred-gated city, had Egypt set the headquarters of her irreconcilable enmity. And it was there, amid the ruins of her loveliest past, that George Isley had spent his years of magical reconstruction and met the influence that now dominated his entire life.

And though no definite avowal of the struggle betrayed itself in speech between us, I remember fragments of conversation, even at this stage, that proved his willing surrender of the present. We spoke of fear once, though with the indirectness of connection I have mentioned. I urged that the mind, once it is forewarned, can remain master of itself and prevent a thing from happening.

'But that does not make the thing unreal,' he objected.

‘The mind can deny it,’ I said. ‘It then becomes unreal.’

He shook his head. ‘One does not deny an unreality. Denial is a childish act of self-protection against something you expect to happen.’ He caught my eye a moment. ‘You deny what you are afraid of,’ he said. ‘Fear invites.’ And he smiled uneasily. ‘You know it must get you in the end.’ And, both of us being aware secretly to what our talk referred, it seemed bold-blooded and improper; for actually we discussed the psychology of his disappearance. Yet, while I disliked it, there was a fascination about the subject that compelled attraction.... ‘Once fear gets in,’ he added presently, ‘confidence is undermined, the structure of life is threatened, and you—go gladly. The foundation of everything is belief. A man is what he believes about himself; and in Egypt you can believe things that elsewhere you would not even think about. It attacks the essentials.’ He sighed, yet with a curious pleasure; and a smile of resignation and relief passed over his rugged features and was gone again. The luxury of abandonment lay already in him.

‘But even belief,’ I protested, ‘must be founded on some experience or other.’ It seemed ghastly to speak of his spiritual malady behind the mask of indirect allusion. My excuse was that he so obviously talked willingly.

He agreed instantly. ‘Experience of one kind or another,’ he said darkly, ‘there always is. Talk with the men who live out here; ask any one who thinks, or who has the imagination which divines. You’ll get only one reply, phrase it how they may. Even the tourists and the little commonplace officials feel it. And it’s not the climate, it’s not nerves, it’s not any definite tendency that they can name or lay their finger on. Nor is it mere orientalising of the mind. It’s something that first takes you from your common life, and that later takes common life from you. You willingly resign an unremunerative Present. There are no half-measures either—once the gates are open.’

There was so much undeniable truth in this that I found no corrective by way of strong rejoinder. All my attempts, indeed, were futile in this way. He meant to go; my words could not stop him. He wanted a witness,—he dreaded the loneliness of going—but he brooked no interference. The contradictory position involved a

perplexing state of heart and mind in both of us. The atmosphere of this majestic land, to-day so trifling, yesterday so immense, most certainly induced a lifting of the spiritual horizon that revealed amazing possibilities.

VII

It was in the windless days of a perfect December that Moleson, the Egyptologist, found us out and paid a flying visit to Helouan. His duties took him up and down the land, but his time seemed largely at his own disposal. He lingered on. His coming introduced a new element I was not quite able to estimate; though, speaking generally, the effect of his presence upon my companion was to emphasize the latter's alteration. It underlined the change, and drew attention to it. The new arrival, I gathered, was not altogether welcome. 'I should never have expected to find you *here*,' laughed Moleson when they met, and whether he referred to Helouan or to the hotel was not quite clear. I got the impression he meant both; I remembered my fancy that it was a good hotel to hide in. George Isley had betrayed a slight involuntary start when the visiting card was brought to him at tea-time. I think he had wished to escape from his former co-worker. Moleson had found him out. 'I heard you had a friend with you and were contemplating further exper—work,' he added. He changed the word 'experiment' quickly to the other.

'The former, as you see, is true, but not the latter,' replied my companion dryly, and in his manner was a touch of opposition that might have been hostility. Their intimacy, I saw, was close and of old standing. In all they said and did and looked, there was an undercurrent of other meaning that just escaped me. They were up to something—they *had* been up to something; but Isley would have withdrawn if he could!

Moleson was an ambitious and energetic personality, absorbed in his profession, alive to the poetical as well as to the practical value of archeology, and he made at first a wholly delightful impression upon me. An instinctive *flair* for his subject had early in life brought him success and a measure of fame as well. His knowledge was accurate and scholarly, his mind saturated in the lore of a vanished civilization. Behind an exterior that was quietly careless, I divined a passionate and complex nature, and I watched him with interest as the man for whom the olden sun-worship of unscientific days held some beauty of reality and truth. Much in his strange book that had

bewildered me now seemed intelligible when I saw the author. I cannot explain this more closely. Something about him somehow made it possible. Though modern to the finger-tips and thoroughly equipped with all the tendencies of the day, there seemed to hide in him another self that held aloof with a dignified detachment from the interests in which his 'educated' mind was centered. He read living secrets beneath museum labels, I might put it. He stepped out of the days of the Pharaohs if ever man did, and I realized early in our acquaintance that this was the man who had exceptional powers of 'resistance and self-protection,' and was, in his particular branch of work, 'unusual.' In manner he was light and gay, his sense of humor strong, with a way of treating everything as though laughter was the sanest attitude towards life. There is, however, the laughter that hides—other things. Moleson, as I gathered from many clues of talk and manner and silence, was a deep and singular being. His experiences in Egypt, if any, he had survived admirably. There were at least two Molesons. I felt him more than double——multiple.

In appearance tall, thin, and fleshless, with a dried-up skin and features withered as a mummy's, he said laughingly that Nature had picked him physically for his 'job'; and, indeed, one could see him worming his way down narrow tunnels into the sandy tombs, and writhing along sunless passages of suffocating heat without too much personal inconvenience. Something sinuous, almost fluid in his mind expressed itself in his body too. He might go in any direction without causing surprise. He might go backwards or forwards. He might go in two directions at once.

And my first impression of the man deepened before many days were past. There was irresponsibility in him, insincerity somewhere, almost want of heart. His morality was certainly not to-day's, and the mind in him was slippery. I think the modern world, to which he was unattached, confused and irritated him. A sense of insecurity came with him. His interest in George Isley was the interest in a psychological 'specimen.' I remembered how in his book he described the selection of individuals for certain functions of that marvelous worship, and the odd idea flashed through me—well, that Isley exactly suited some purpose of his re-creating energies. The man was keenly observant from top to toe, but not with his

sight alone; he seemed to be aware of motives and emotions before he noticed the acts or gestures that these caused. I felt that he took me in as well. Certainly he eyed me up and down by means of this inner observation that seemed automatic with him.

Moleson was not staying in our hotel; he had chosen one where social life was more abundant; but he came up frequently to lunch and dine, and sometimes spent the evening in Isley's rooms, amusing us with his skill upon the piano, singing Arab songs, and chanting phrases from the ancient Egyptian rituals to rhythms of his own invention. The old Egyptian music, both in harmony and melody, was far more developed than I had realized, the use of sound having been of radical importance in their ceremonies. The chanting in particular he did with extraordinary effect, though whether its success lay in his sonorous voice, his peculiar increasing of the vowel sounds, or in anything deeper, I cannot pretend to say. The result at any rate was of a unique description. It brought buried Egypt to the surface; the gigantic Presence entered sensibly into the room. It came, huge and gorgeous, rolling upon the mind the instant he began, and something in it was both terrible and oppressive. The repose of eternity lay in the sound. Invariably, after a few moments of that transforming music, I saw the Valley of the Kings, the deserted temples, titanic faces of stone, great effigies coiffed with zodiacal signs, but above all—the twin Colossi.

I mentioned this latter detail.

'Curious *you* should feel that too—curious you should say it, I mean,' Moleson replied, not looking at me, yet with an air as if I had said something he expected. 'To me the Memnon figures express Egypt better than all the other monuments put together. Like the desert, they are featureless. They sum her up, as it were, yet leave the message unuttered. For, you see, they cannot.' He laughed a little in his throat. 'They have neither eyes nor lips nor nose; their features are gone.'

'Yet they tell the secret—to those who care to listen,' put in Isley in a scarcely noticeable voice. 'Just because they have no words. They still sing at dawn,' he added in a louder, almost a challenging tone. It startled me.

Moleson turned round at him, opened his lips to speak, hesitated, stopped. He said nothing for a moment. I cannot describe what it was in the lightning glance they exchanged that put me on the alert for something other than was obvious. My nerves quivered suddenly, and a breath of colder air stole in among us. Moleson swung round to me again. 'I almost think,' he said, laughing when I complimented him upon the music, 'that I must have been a priest of Aton-Ra in an earlier existence, for all this comes to my finger-tips as if it were instinctive knowledge. Plotinus, remember, lived a few miles away at Alexandria with his great idea that knowledge is recollection,' he said, with a kind of cynical amusement. 'In those days, at any rate,' he added more significantly, 'worship was real and ceremonials actually expressed great ideas and teaching. There was power in them.' Two of the Molesons spoke in that contradictory utterance.

I saw that Isley was fidgeting where he sat, betraying by certain gestures that uneasiness was in him. He hid his face a moment in his hands; he sighed; he made a movement—as though to prevent something coming. But Moleson resisted his attempt to change the conversation, though the key shifted a little of its own accord. There were numerous occasions like this when I was aware that both men skirted something that had happened, something that Moleson wished to resume, but that Isley seemed anxious to postpone.

I found myself studying Moleson's personality, yet never getting beyond a certain point. Shrewd, subtle, with an acute rather than a large intelligence, he was cynical as well as insincere, and yet I cannot describe by what means I arrived at two other conclusions as well about him: first, that this insincerity and want of heart had not been so always; and, secondly, that he sought social diversion with deliberate and un-ordinary purpose. I could well believe that the first was Egypt's mark upon him, and the second an effort at resistance and self-protection.

'If it wasn't for the gaiety,' he remarked once in a flippant way that thinly hid significance, 'a man out here would go under in a year. Social life gets rather reckless—exaggerated—people do things they would never dream of doing at home. Perhaps you've noticed it,' he

added, looking suddenly at me; ‘Cairo and the rest—they plunge at it as though driven—a sort of excess about it somewhere.’ I nodded agreement. The way he said it was unpleasant rather. ‘It’s an antidote,’ he said, a sub-acid flavor in his tone. ‘I used to loathe society myself. But now I find gaiety—a certain irresponsible excitement—of importance. Egypt gets on the nerves after a bit. The moral fiber fails. The will grows weak.’ And he glanced covertly at Isley as with a desire to point his meaning. ‘It’s the clash between the ugly present and the majestic past, perhaps.’ He smiled.

Isley shrugged his shoulders, making no reply; and the other went on to tell stories of friends and acquaintances whom Egypt had adversely affected: Barton, the Oxford man, school teacher, who had insisted in living in a tent until the Government relieved him of his job. He took to his tent, roamed the desert, drawn irresistibly, practical considerations of the present of no avail. This yearning took him, though he could never define the exact attraction. In the end his mental balance was disturbed. ‘But now he’s all right again; I saw him in London only this year; he can’t say what he felt or why he did it. Only—he’s different.’ Of John Lattin, too, he spoke, whom agarophobia caught so terribly in Upper Egypt; of Malahide, upon whom some fascination of the Nile induced suicidal mania and attempts at drowning; of Jim Moleson, a cousin (who had camped at Thebes with himself and Isley), whom megalomania of a most singular type attacked suddenly in a sandy waste—all radically cured as soon as they left Egypt, yet, one and all, changed and made otherwise in their very souls.

He talked in a loose, disjointed way, and though much he said was fantastic, as if meant to challenge opposition, there was impressiveness about it somewhere, due, I think, to a kind of cumulative emotion he produced.

‘The monuments do not impress merely by their bulk, but by their majestic symmetry,’ I remember him saying. ‘Look at the choice of form alone—the Pyramids, for instance. No other shape was possible: dome, square, spires, all would have been hideously inadequate. The wedge-shaped mass, immense foundations and pointed apex were the *mot juste* in outline. Do you think people without greatness in themselves chose that form? There was no

unbalance in the minds that conceived the harmonious and magnificent structures of the temples. There was stately grandeur in their consciousness that could only be born of truth and knowledge. The power in their images is a direct expression of eternal and essential things they knew.'

We listened in silence. He was off upon his hobby. But behind the careless tone and laughing questions there was this lurking passionateness that made me feel uncomfortable. He was edging up, I felt, towards some climax that meant life and death to himself and Isley. I could not fathom it. My sympathy let me in a little, yet not enough to understand completely. Isley, I saw, was also uneasy, though for reasons that equally evaded me.

'One can almost believe,' he continued, 'that something still hangs about in the atmosphere from those olden times.' He half closed his eyes, but I caught the gleam in them. 'It affects the mind through the imagination. With some it changes the point of view. It takes the soul back with it to former, quite different, conditions, that must have been almost another kind of consciousness.'

He paused an instant and looked up at us. 'The *intensity* of belief in those days,' he resumed, since neither of us accepted the challenge, 'was amazing—something quite unknown anywhere in the world to-day. It was so sure, so positive; no mere speculative theories, I mean;—as though something in the climate, the exact position beneath the stars, the "attitude" of this particular stretch of earth in relation to the sun—thinned the veil between humanity—and other things. Their hierarchies of gods, you know, were not mere idols; animals, birds, monsters, and what-not, all typified spiritual forces and powers that influenced their daily life. But the strong thing is—they *knew*. People who were scientific as they were did not swallow foolish superstitions. They made colors that could last six thousand years, even in the open air; and without instruments they measured accurately—an enormously difficult and involved calculation—the precession of the equinoxes. You've been to Denderah?'—he suddenly glanced again at me. 'No! Well, the minds that realized the zodiacal signs could hardly believe, you know, that Hathor was a cow!'

Isley coughed. He was about to interrupt, but before he could find

words, Moleson was off again, some new quality in his tone and manner that was almost aggressive. The hints he offered seemed more than hints. There was a strange conviction in his heart. I think he was skirting a bigger thing that he and his companion knew, yet that his real object was to see in how far I was open to attack—how far my sympathy might be with them. I became aware that he and George Isley shared this bigger thing. It was based, I felt, on some certain knowledge that experiment had brought them.

'Think of the grand teaching of Aknahton, that young Pharaoh who regenerated the entire land and brought it to its immense prosperity. He taught the worship of the sun, but not of the visible sun. The deity had neither form nor shape. The great disk of glory was but the manifestation, each beneficent ray ending in a hand that blessed the world. It was a god of everlasting energy, love and power, yet men could know it at first hand in their daily lives, worshiping it at dawn and sunset with passionate devotion. No anthropomorphic idol masqueraded in *that*!'

An extraordinary glow was about him as he said it. The same minute he lowered his voice, shifting the key perceptibly. He kept looking up at me through half-closed eyelids.

'And another thing they wonderfully knew,' he almost whispered, 'was that, with the precession of their deity across the equinoctial changes, there came new powers down into the world of men. Each cycle—each zodiacal sign—brought its special powers which they quickly typified in the monstrous effigies we label to-day in our dull museums. Each sign took some two thousand years to traverse. Each sign, moreover, involved a change in human consciousness. There was this relation between the heavens and the human heart. All that they knew. While the sun crawled through the sign of Taurus, it was the Bull they worshiped; with Aries, it was the ram that coiffed their granite symbols. Then came, as you remember, with Pisces the great New Arrival, when already they sank from their grand zenith, and the Fish was taken as the emblem of the changing powers which the Christ embodied. For the human soul, they held, echoed the changes in the immense journey of the original deity, who is its source, across the Zodiac, and the truth of "As above, so Below" remains the key to all manifested life. And to-

day the sun, just entering Aquarius, new powers are close upon the world. The old—that which has been for two thousand years—again is crumbling, passing, dying. New powers and a new consciousness are knocking at our doors. It is a time of change. It is also'—he leaned forward so that his eyes came close before me—'the time to make the change. The soul can choose its own conditions. It can ____'

A sudden crash smothered the rest of the sentence. A chair had fallen with a clatter upon the wooden floor where the carpet left it bare. Whether Isley in rising had stumbled against it, or whether he had purposely knocked it over, I could not say. I only knew that he had abruptly risen and as abruptly sat down again. A curious feeling came to me that the sign was somehow prearranged. It was so sudden. His voice, too, was forced, I thought.

'Yes, but we can do without all that, Moleson,' he interrupted with acute abruptness. 'Suppose we have a tune instead.'

VIII

It was after dinner in his private room, and he had sat very silent in his corner until this sudden outburst. Moleson got up quietly without a word and moved over to the piano. I saw—or was it imagination merely?—a new expression slide upon his withered face. He meant mischief somewhere.

From that instant—from the moment he rose and walked over the thick carpet—he fascinated me. The atmosphere his talk and stories had brought remained. His lean fingers ran over the keys, and at first he played fragments from popular musical comedies that were pleasant enough, but made no demand upon the attention. I heard them without listening. I was thinking of another thing—his walk. For the way he moved across those few feet of carpet had power in it. He looked different; he seemed another man; he was changed. I saw him curiously—as I sometimes now saw Isley too—bigger. In some manner that was both enchanting and oppressive, his presence from that moment drew my imagination as by an air of authority it held.

I left my seat in the far corner and dropped into a chair beside the window, nearer to the piano. Isley, I then noticed, had also turned to watch him. But it was George Isley not quite as he was now. I felt rather than saw the change. Both men had subtly altered. They seemed extended, their outlines shadowy.

Isley, alert and anxious, glanced up at the player, his mind of earlier years—for the expression of his face was plain—following the light music, yet with difficulty that involved effort, almost struggle. ‘Play that again, will you?’ I heard him say from time to time. He was trying to take hold of it, to climb back to a condition where that music had linked him to the present, to seize a mental structure that was gone, to grip hold tightly of it—only to find that it was too far forgotten and too fragile. It would not bear him. I am sure of it, and I can swear I divined his mood. He fought to realize himself as he had been, but in vain. In his dim corner opposite I watched him closely. The big black Blüthner blocked itself between us. Above it swayed the outline, lean and half shadowy, of Moleson as he

played. A faint whisper floated through the room. ‘You are in Egypt.’ Nowhere else could this queer feeling of presentiment, of anticipation, have gained a footing so easily. I was aware of intense emotion in all three of us. The least reminder of To-day seemed ugly. I longed for some ancient forgotten splendor that was lost.

The scene fixed my attention very steadily, for I was aware of something deliberate and calculated on Moleson’s part. The thing was well considered in his mind, intention only half concealed. It was Egypt he interpreted by sound, expressing what in him was true, then observing its effect, as he led us cleverly towards—the past. Beginning with the present, he played persuasively, with penetration, with insistent meaning too. He had that touch which conjured up real atmosphere, and, at first, that atmosphere termed modern. He rendered vividly the note of London, passing from the jingles of musical comedy, nervous rag-times and sensuous Tango dances, into the higher strains of concert rooms and ‘cultured’ circles. Yet not too abruptly. Most dexterously he shifted the level, and with it our emotion. I recognized, as in a parody, various ultra-modern thrills: the tumult of Strauss, the pagan sweetness of primitive Debussy, the weirdness and ecstasy of metaphysical Scriabin. The composite note of To-day in both extremes, he brought into this private sitting-room of the desert hotel, while George Isley, listening keenly, fidgeted in his chair.

‘“Après-midi d’un Faune,”’ said Moleson dreamily, answering the question as to what he played. ‘Debussy’s, you know. And the thing before it was from “Til Eulenspiegel”—Strauss, of course.’

He drawled, swaying slowly with the rhythm, and leaving pauses between the words. His attention was not wholly on his listener, and in the voice was a quality that increased my uneasy apprehension. I felt distress for Isley somewhere. Something, it seemed, was coming; Moleson brought it. Unconsciously in his walk, it now appeared consciously in his music; and it came from what was underground in him. A charm, a subtle change, stole oddly over the room. It stole over my heart as well. Some power of estimating left me, as though my mind were slipping backwards and losing familiar, common standards.

‘The true modern note in it, isn’t there?’ he drawled; ‘cleverness, I

think—intellectual—surface ingenuity—no depth or permanence—just the sensational brilliance of To-day.' He turned and stared at me fixedly an instant. 'Nothing *everlasting*,' he added impressively. 'It tells everything it knows—because it's small enough——'

And the room turned pettier as he said it; another, bigger shadow draped its little walls. Through the open windows came a stealthy gesture of eternity. The atmosphere stretched visibly. Moleson was playing a marvelous fragment from Scriabin's 'Prometheus.' It sounded thin and shallow. This modern music, all of it, was out of place and trivial. It was almost ridiculous. The scale of our emotion changed insensibly into a deeper thing that has no name in dictionaries, being of another age. And I glanced at the windows where stone columns framed dim sections of great Egypt listening outside. There was no moon; only deep draughts of stars blazed, hanging in the sky. I thought with awe of the mysterious knowledge that vanished people had of these stars, and of the Sun's huge journey through the Zodiac....

And, with astonishing suddenness as of dream, there rose a pictured image against that starlit sky. Lifted into the air, between heaven and earth, I saw float swiftly past a panorama of the stately temples, led by Denderah, Edfu, Abou Simbel. It paused, it hovered, it disappeared. Leaving incalculable solemnity behind it in the air, it vanished, and to see so vast a thing move at that easy yet unhasting speed unhinged some sense of measurement in me. It was, of course, I assured myself, mere memory objectified owing to something that the music summoned, yet the apprehension rose in me that the whole of Egypt presently would stream past in similar fashion—Egypt as she was in the zenith of her unrecoverable past. Behind the tinkling of the modern piano passed the rustling of a multitude, the tramping of countless feet on sand.... It was singularly vivid. It arrested in me something that normally went flowing.... And when I turned my head towards the room to call attention to my strange experience, the eyes of Moleson, I saw, were laid upon my own. He stared at me. The light in them transfixed me, and I understood that the illusion was due in some manner to his evocation. Isley rose at the same moment from his chair. The thing I had vaguely been expecting had shifted closer. And the same moment the musician abruptly changed his key.

‘You may like this better,’ he murmured, half to himself, but in tones he somehow made echoing. ‘It’s more suited to the place.’ There was a resonance in the voice as though it emerged from hollows underground. ‘The other seems almost sacrilegious—here.’ And his voice drawled off in the rhythm of slower modulations that he played. It had grown muffled. There was an impression, too, that he did not strike the piano, but that the music issued from himself.

‘Place! What place?’ asked Isley quickly. His head turned sharply as he spoke. His tone, in its remoteness, made me tremble.

The musician laughed to himself. ‘I meant that this hotel seems really an impertinence,’ he murmured, leaning down upon the notes he played upon so softly and so well; ‘and that it’s but the thinnest kind of pretense—when you come to think of it. We are in the desert really. The Colossi are outside, and all the emptied temples. Or ought to be,’ he added, raising his tone abruptly with a glance at me.

He straightened up and stared out into the starry sky past George Isley’s shoulders.

‘That,’ he exclaimed with betraying vehemence, ‘is where we are and what we play to!’ His voice suddenly increased; there was a roar in it. ‘That,’ he repeated, ‘is the thing that takes our hearts away.’ The volume of intonation was astonishing.

For the way he uttered the monosyllable suddenly revealed the man beneath the outer sheath of cynicism and laughter, explained his heartlessness, his secret stream of life. He, too, was soul and body in the past. ‘That’ revealed more than pages of descriptive phrases. His heart lived in the temple aisles, his mind unearthed forgotten knowledge; his soul had clothed itself anew in the seductive glory of antiquity: he dwelt with a quickening magic of existence in the reconstructed splendor of what most term only ruins. He and George Isley together had revivified a power that enticed them backwards; but whereas the latter struggled still, the former had already made his permanent home there. The faculty in me that saw the vision of streaming temples saw also this—remorselessly definite. Moleson himself sat naked at that piano. I saw him clearly then. He no longer masqueraded behind his sneers and laughter.

He, too, had long ago surrendered, lost himself, gone out, and from the place his soul now dwelt in he watched George Isley sinking down to join him. He lived in ancient, subterranean Egypt. This great hotel stood precariously on the merest upper crust of desert. A thousand tombs, a hundred temples lay outside, within reach almost of our very voices. Moleson was merged with 'that.'

This intuition flashed upon me like the picture in the sky; and both were true.

And, meanwhile, this other thing he played had a surge of power in it impossible to describe. It was sombre, huge and solemn. It conveyed the power that his walk conveyed. There was distance in it, but a distance not of space alone. A remoteness of time breathed through it with that strange sadness and melancholy yearning that enormous interval brings. It marched, but very far away; it held refrains that assumed the rhythms of a multitude the centuries muted; it sang, but the singing was underground in passages that fine sand muffled. Lost, wandering winds sighed through it, booming. The contrast, after the modern, cheaper music, was dislocating. Yet the change had been quite naturally effected.

'It would sound empty and monotonous elsewhere—in London, for instance,' I heard Moleson drawling, as he swayed to and fro, 'but here it is big and splendid—true. You hear what I mean,' he added gravely. 'You understand?'

'What is it?' asked Isley thickly, before I could say a word. 'I forget exactly. It has tears in it—more than I can bear.' The end of his sentence died away in his throat.

Moleson did not look at him as he answered. He looked at me.

'You surely ought to know,' he replied, the voice rising and falling as though the rhythm forced it. 'You have heard it all before—that chant from the ritual we——'

Isley sprang up and stopped him. I did not hear the sentence complete. An extraordinary thought blazed into me that the voices of both men were not quite their own. I fancied—wild, impossible as it sounds—that I heard the twin Colossi singing to each other in

the dawn. Stupendous ideas sprang past me, leaping. It seemed as though eternal symbols of the cosmos, discovered and worshiped in this ancient land, leaped into awful life. My consciousness became enveloping. I had the distressing feeling that ages slipped out of place and took me with them; they dominated me; they rushed me off my feet like water. I was drawn backwards. I, too, was changing —being changed.

‘I remember,’ said Isley softly, a reverence of worship in his voice. But there was anguish in it too, and pity; he let the present go completely from him; the last strands severed with a wrench of pain. I imagined I heard his soul pass weeping far away—below.

‘I’ll sing it,’ murmured Moleson, ‘for the voice is necessary. The sound and rhythm are utterly divine!’

IX

And forthwith his voice began a series of long-drawn cadences that seemed somehow the root-sounds of every tongue that ever was. A spell came over me I could touch and feel. A web encompassed me; my arms and feet became entangled; a veil of fine threads wove across my eyes. The enthralling power of the rhythm produced some magical movement in the soul. I was aware of life everywhere about me, far and near, in the dwellings of the dead, as also in the corridors of the iron hills. Thebes stood erect, and Memphis teemed upon the river banks. For the modern world fell, swaying, at this sound that restored the past, and in this past both men before me lived and had their being. The storm of present life passed o'er their heads, while they dwelt underground, obliterated, gone. Upon the wave of sound they went down into their recovered kingdom.

I shivered, moved vigorously, half rose up, then instantly sank back again, resigned and helpless. For I entered by their side, it seemed, the conditions of their strange captivity. My thoughts, my feelings, my point of view were transplanted to another center. Consciousness shifted in me. I saw things from another's point of view—antiquity's.

The present forgotten but the past supreme, I lost Reality. Our room became a pin-point picture seen in a drop of water, while this subterranean world, replacing it, turned immense. My heart took on the gigantic, leisured stride of what had been. Proportions grew; size captured me; and magnitude, turned monstrous, swept mere measurement away. Some hand of golden sunshine picked me up and set me in the quivering web beside those other two. I heard the rustle of the settling threads; I heard the shuffling of the feet in sand; I heard the whispers in the dwellings of the dead. Behind the monotony of this sacerdotal music I heard them in their dim carved chambers. The ancient galleries were awake. The Life of unremembered ages stirred in multitudes about me.

The reality of so incredible an experience evaporates through the stream of language. I can only affirm this singular proof—that the deepest, most satisfying knowledge the Present could offer seemed

insignificant beside some stalwart majesty of the Past that utterly usurped it. This modern room, holding a piano and two figures of To-day, appeared as a paltry miniature pinned against a vast transparent curtain, whose foreground was thick with symbols of temple, sphinx and pyramid, but whose background of stupendous hanging grey slid off towards a splendor where the cities of the Dead shook off their sand and thronged space to its ultimate horizons.... The stars, the entire universe, vibrating and alive, became involved in it. Long periods of time slipped past me. I seemed living ages ago.... I was living backwards....

The size and eternity of Egypt took me easily. There was an overwhelming grandeur in it that elbowed out all present standards. The whole place towered and stood up. The desert reared, the very horizons lifted; majestic figures of granite rose above the hotel, great faces hovered and drove past; huge arms reached up to pluck the stars and set them in the ceilings of the labyrinthine tombs. The colossal meaning of the ancient land emerged through all its ruined details ... reconstructed—burningly alive....

It became at length unbearable. I longed for the droning sounds to cease, for the rhythm to lessen its prodigious sweep. My heart cried out for the gold of the sunlight on the desert, for the sweet air by the river's banks, for the violet lights upon the hills at dawn. And I resisted, I made an effort to return.

'Your chant is horrible. For God's sake, let's have an Arab song—or the music of To-day!'

The effort was intense, the result was—nothing. I swear I used these words. I heard the actual sound of my voice, if no one else did, for I remember that it was pitiful in the way great space devoured it, making of its appreciable volume the merest whisper as of some bird or insect cry. But the figure that I took for Moleson, instead of answer or acknowledgment, merely grew and grew as things grow in a fairy tale. I hardly know; I certainly cannot say. That dwindling part of me which offered comments on the entire occurrence noted this extraordinary effect as though it happened naturally—that Moleson himself was marvelously increasing.

The entire spell became operative all at once. I experienced both

the delight of complete abandonment and the terror of letting go what *had* seemed real. I understood Moleson's sham laughter, and the subtle resignation of George Isley. And an amazing thought flashed birdlike across my changing consciousness—that this resurrection into the Past, this rebirth of the spirit which they sought, involved taking upon themselves the guise of these ancient symbols each in turn. As the embryo assumes each evolutionary stage below it before the human semblance is attained, so the souls of those two adventurers took upon themselves the various emblems of that intense belief. The devout worshiper takes on the qualities of his deity. They wore the entire series of the old-world gods so potently that I perceived them, and even objectified them by my senses. The present was their pre-natal stage; to enter the past they were being born again.

But it was not Moleson's semblance alone that took on this awful change. Both faces, scaled to the measure of Egypt's outstanding quality of size, became in this little modern room distressingly immense. Distorting mirrors can suggest no simile, for the symmetry of proportion was not injured. I lost their human physiognomies. I saw their thoughts, their feelings, their augmented, altered hearts, the thing that Egypt put there while she stole their love from modern life. There grew an awful stateliness upon them that was huge, mysterious, and motionless as stone.

For Moleson's narrow face at first turned hawk-like in the semblance of the sinister deity, Horus, only stretched to tower above the toy-scaled piano; it was keen and sly and monstrous after prey, while a swiftness of the sunrise leaped from both the brilliant eyes. George Isley, equally immense of outline, was in general presentment more magnificent, a breadth of the Sphinx about his spreading shoulders, and in his countenance an inscrutable power of calm temple images. These were the first signs of obsession; but others followed. In rapid series, like lantern-slides upon a screen, the ancient symbols flashed one after another across these two extended human faces and were gone. Disentanglement became impossible. The successive signatures seemed almost superimposed as in a composite photograph, each appearing and vanished before recognition was even possible, while I interpreted the inner alchemy by means of outer tokens familiar to my senses. Egypt,

possessing them, expressed herself thus marvelously in their physical aspect, using the symbols of her intense, regenerative power....

The changes merged with such swiftness into one another that I did not seize the half of them—till, finally, the procession culminated in a single one that remained fixed awfully upon them both. The entire series merged. I was aware of this single masterful image which summed up all the others in sublime repose. The gigantic thing rose up in this incredible statue form. The spirit of Egypt synthesized in this monstrous symbol, obliterated them both. I saw the seated figures of the grim Colossi, dipped in sand, night over them, waiting for the dawn....

X

I made a violent effort, then, at self-assertion—an effort to focus my mind upon the present. And, searching for Moleson and George Isley, its nearest details, I was aware that I could not find them. The familiar figures of my two companions were not discoverable. I saw it as plainly as I also saw that ludicrous, wee piano—for a moment. But the moment remained; the Eternity of Egypt stayed. For that lonely and terrific pair had stooped their shoulders and bowed their awful heads. They were in the room. They imaged forth the power of the everlasting Past through the little structures of two human worshipers. Room, walls, and ceiling fled away. Sand and the open sky replaced them.

The two of them rose side by side before my bursting eyes. I knew not where to look. Like some child who confronts its giants upon the nursery floor, I turned to stone, unable to think or move. I stared. Sight wrenched itself to find the men familiar to it, but found instead this symbolizing vision. I could not see them properly. Their faces were spread with hugeness, their features lost in some uncommon magnitude, their shoulders, necks, and arms grown vast upon the air. As with the desert, there was physiognomy yet no personal expression, the human thing all drowned within the mass of battered stone. I discovered neither cheeks nor mouth nor jaw, but ruined eyes and lips of broken granite. Huge, motionless, mysterious, Egypt informed them and took them to herself. And between us, curiously presented in some false perspective, I saw the little symbol of To-day—the Blüthner piano. It was appalling. I knew a second of majestic horror. I blenched. Hot and cold gushed through me. Strength left me, power of speech and movement too, as in a moment of complete paralysis.

The spell, moreover, was not within the room alone; it was outside and everywhere. The Past stood massed about the very walls of the hotel. Distance, as well as time, stepped nearer. That chanting summoned the gigantic items in all their ancient splendor. The shadowy concourse grouped itself upon the sand about us, and I was aware that the great army shifted noiselessly into place; that pyramids soared and towered; that deities of stone stood by; that

temples ranged themselves in reconstructed beauty, grave as the night of time whence they emerged; and that the outline of the Sphinx, motionless but aggressive, piled its dim bulk upon the atmosphere. Immensity answered to immensity.... There were vast intervals of time and there were reaches of enormous distance, yet all happened in a moment, and all happened within a little space. It was now and here. Eternity whispered in every second as in every grain of sand. Yet, while aware of so many stupendous details all at once, I was really aware of one thing only—that the spirit of ancient Egypt faced me in these two terrific figures, and that my consciousness, stretched painfully yet gloriously, included all, as She also unquestionably included them—and me.

For it seemed I shared the likeness of my two companions. Some lesser symbol, though of similar kind, obsessed me too. I tried to move, but my feet were set in stone; my arms lay fixed; my body was embedded in the rock. Sand beat sharply upon my outer surface, urged upwards in little flurries by a chilly wind. There was nothing felt: I *heard* the rattle of the scattering grains against my hardened body....

And we waited for the dawn; for the resurrection of that unchanging deity who was the source and inspiration of all our glorious life.... The air grew keen and fresh. In the distance a line of sky turned from pink to violet and gold; a delicate rose next flushed the desert; a few pale stars hung fainting overhead; and the wind that brought the sunrise was already stirring. The whole land paused upon the coming of its mighty God....

Into the pause there rose a curious sound for which we had been waiting. For it came familiarly, as though expected. I could have sworn at first that it was George Isley who sang, answering his companion. There beat behind its great volume the same note and rhythm, only so prodigiously increased that, while Moleson's chant had waked it, it now was independent and apart. The resonant vibrations of what he sang had reached down into the places where it slept. *They* uttered synchronously. Egypt spoke. There was in it the deep muttering as of a thousand drums, as though the desert uttered in prodigious syllables. I listened while my heart of stone stood still. There were two voices in the sky. *They* spoke

tremendously with each other in the dawn:

‘So easily we still remain possessors of the land.... While the centuries roar past us and are gone.’

Soft with power the syllables rolled forth, yet with a booming depth as though caverns underground produced them.

‘Our silence is disturbed. Pass on with the multitude towards the East.... Still in the dawn we sing the old-world wisdom.... They shall hear our speech, yet shall not hear it with their ears of flesh. At dawn our words go forth, searching the distances of sand and time across the sunlight.... At dusk they return, as upon eagles’ wings, entering again our lips of stone.... Each century one syllable, yet no sentence yet complete. While our lips are broken with the utterance....’

It seemed that hours and months and years went past me while I listened in my sandy bed. The fragments died far away, then sounded very close again. It was as though mountain peaks sang to one another above clouds. Wind caught the muffled roar away. Wind brought it back.... Then, in a hollow pause that lasted years, conveying marvelously the passage of long periods, I heard the utterance more clearly. The leisured roll of the great voice swept through me like a flood:

‘We wait and watch and listen in our loneliness. We do not close our eyes. The moon and stars sail past us, and our river finds the sea. We bring Eternity upon your broken lives.... We see you build your little lines of steel across our territory behind the thin white smoke. We hear the whistle of your messengers of iron through the air.... The nations rise and pass. The empires flutter westwards and are gone.... The sun grows older and the stars turn pale.... Winds shift the line of the horizons, and our River moves its bed. But we, everlasting and unchangeable, remain. Of water, sand and fire is our essential being, yet built within the universal air.... There is no pause in life, there is no break in death. The changes bring no end. The sun returns.... There is eternal resurrection.... But our kingdom is underground in shadow, unrealized of your little day.... Come, come! The temples still are crowded, and our Desert blesses you. Our River takes your feet. Our sand shall purify, and the fire of our

God shall burn you sweetly into wisdom.... Come, then, and worship, for the time draws near. It is the dawn....'

The voices died down into depths that the sand of ages muffled, while the flaming dawn of the East rushed up the sky. Sunrise, the great symbol of life's endless resurrection, was at hand. About me, in immense but shadowy array, stood the whole of ancient Egypt, hanging breathlessly upon the moment of adoration. No longer stern and terrible in the splendor of their long neglect, the effigies rose erect with passionate glory, a forest of stately stone. Their granite lips were parted and their ancient eyes were wide. All faced the east. And the sun drew nearer to the rim of the attentive Desert.

XI

Emotion there seemed none, in the sense that *I* knew feeling. I knew, if anything, the ultimate secrets of two primitive sensations—joy and awe.... The dawn grew swiftly brighter. There was gold, as though the sands of Nubia spilt their brilliance on each shining detail; there was glory, as though the retreating tide of stars spilt their light foam upon the world; and there was passion, as though the beliefs of all the ages floated back with abandonment into the—Sun. Ruined Egypt merged into a single temple of elemental vastness whose floor was the empty desert, but whose walls rose to the stars.

Abruptly, then, chanting and rhythm ceased; they dipped below. Sand muffled them. And the Sun looked down upon its ancient world....

A radiant warmth poured through me. I found that I could move my limbs again. A sense of triumphant life ran through my stony frame. For one passing second I heard the shower of gritty particles upon my surface like sand blown upwards by a gust of wind, but this time I could *feel* the sting of it upon my skin. It passed. The drenching heat bathed me from head to foot, while stony insensibility gave place with returning consciousness to flesh and blood. The sun had risen.... I was alive, but I was—changed.

It seemed I opened my eyes. An immense relief was in me. I turned; I drew a deep, refreshing breath; I stretched one leg upon a thick, green carpet. Something had left me; another thing had returned. I sat up, conscious of welcome release, of freedom, of escape.

There was some violent, disorganizing break. I found myself; I found Moleson; I found George Isley too. He had got shifted in that room without my being aware of it. Isley had risen. He came upon me like a blow. I saw him move his arms. Fire flashed from below his hands; and I realized then that he was turning on the electric lights. They emerged from different points along the walls, in the alcove, beneath the ceiling, by the writing-table; and one had just that minute blazed into my eyes from a bracket close above me. I was back again in the Present among modern things.

But, while most of the details presented themselves gradually to my recovered senses, Isley returned with this curious effect of speed and distance—like a blow upon the mind. From great height and from prodigious size—he dropped. I seemed to find him rushing at me. Moleson was simply 'there'; there was no speed or sudden change in him as with the other. Motionless at the piano, his long thin hands lay down upon the keys yet did not strike them. But Isley came back like lightning into the little room, signs of the monstrous obsession still about his altering features. There was battle and worship mingled in his deep-set eyes. His mouth, though set, was smiling. With a shudder I positively saw the vastness slipping from his face as shadows from a stretch of broken cliff. There was this awful mingling of proportions. The colossal power that had resumed his being drew slowly inwards. There was collapse in him. And upon the sunburned cheek of his rugged face I saw a tear.

Poignant revulsion caught me then for a moment. The present showed itself in rags. The reduction of scale was painful. I yearned for the splendor that was gone, yet still seemed so hauntingly almost within reach. The cheapness of the hotel room, the glaring ugliness of its tinsel decoration, the baseness of ideals where utility instead of beauty, gain instead of worship, governed life—this, with the dwindled aspect of my companions to the insignificance of marionettes, brought a hungry pain that was at first intolerable. In the glare of light I noticed the small round face of the portable clock upon the mantelpiece, showing half-past eleven. Moleson had been two hours at the piano. And this measuring faculty of my mind completed the disillusionment. I was, indeed, back among present things. The mechanical spirit of To-day imprisoned me again.

For a considerable interval we neither moved nor spoke; the sudden change left the emotions in confusion; we had leaped from a height, from the top of the pyramid, from a star—and the crash of landing scattered thought. I stole a glance at Isley, wondering vaguely why he was there at all; the look of resignation had replaced the power in his face; the tear was brushed away. There was no struggle in him now, no sign of resistance; there was abandonment only; he seemed insignificant. The real George Isley was elsewhere: he

himself had not returned.

By jerks, as it were, and by awkward stages, then, we all three came back to common things again. I found that we were talking ordinarily, asking each other questions, answering, lighting cigarettes, and all the rest. Moleson played some commonplace chords upon the piano, while he leaned back listlessly in his chair, putting in sentences now and again and chatting idly to whichever of us would listen. And Isley came slowly across the room towards me, holding out cigarettes. His dark brown face had shadows on it. He looked exhausted, worn, like some soldier broken in the wars.

‘You liked it?’ I heard his thin voice asking. There was no interest, no expression; it was not the real Isley who spoke; it was the little part of him that had come back. He smiled like a marvelous automaton.

Mechanically I took the cigarette he offered me, thinking confusedly what answer I could make.

‘It’s irresistible,’ I murmured; ‘I understand that it’s easier to go.’

‘Sweeter as well,’ he whispered with a sigh, ‘and very wonderful!’

XII

The hand that lit my cigarette, I saw, was trembling. A desire to do something violent woke in me suddenly—to move energetically, to push or drive something away.

'What was it?' I asked abruptly, in a louder, half-challenging voice, intended for the man at the piano. 'Such a performance—upon others—without first asking their permission—seems to me unpermissible—it's—'

And it was Moleson who replied. He ignored the end of my sentence as though he had not heard it. He strolled over to our side, taking a cigarette and pressing it carefully into shape between his long thin fingers.

'You may well ask,' he answered quietly; 'but it's not so easy to tell. We discovered it'—he nodded towards Isley—'two years ago in the "Valley." It lay beside a Priest, a very important personage, apparently, and was part of the Ritual he used in the worship of the sun. In the Museum now—you can see it any day at the Boulak—it is simply labeled "Hymn to Ra." The period was Aknahton's.'

'The words, yes,' put in Isley, who was listening closely.

'The words?' repeated Moleson in a curious tone. 'There *are* no words. It's all really a manipulation of the vowel sounds. And the rhythm, or chanting, or whatever you like to call it, I—I invented myself. The Egyptians did not write their music, you see.' He suddenly searched my face a moment with questioning eyes. 'Any words you heard,' he said, 'or thought you heard, were merely your own interpretation.'

I stared at him, making no rejoinder.

'They made use of what they called a "root-language" in their rituals,' he went on, 'and it consisted entirely of vowel sounds. There were no consonants. For vowel sounds, you see, run on for ever without end or beginning, whereas consonants interrupt their flow

and break it up and limit it. A consonant has no sound of its own at all. Real language is continuous.'

We stood a moment, smoking in silence. I understood then that this thing Moleson had done was based on definite knowledge. He had rendered some fragment of an ancient Ritual he and Isley had unearthed together, and while he knew its effect upon the latter, he chanced it on myself. Not otherwise, I feel, could it have influenced me in the extraordinary way it did. In the faith and poetry of a nation lies its soul-life, and the gigantic faith of Egypt blazed behind the rhythm of that long, monotonous chant. There were blood and heart and nerves in it. Millions had heard it sung; millions had wept and prayed and yearned; it was ensouled by the passion of that marvelous civilization that loved the godhead of the Sun, and that now hid, waiting but still alive, below the ground. The majestic faith of ancient Egypt poured up with it—that tremendous, burning elaboration of the after-life and of Eternity that was the pivot of those spacious days. For centuries vast multitudes, led by their royal priests, had uttered this very form and ritual—believed it, lived it, felt it. The rising of the sun remained its climax. Its spiritual power still clung to the great ruined symbols. The faith of a buried civilization had burned back into the present and into our hearts as well.

And a curious respect for the man who was able to produce this effect upon two modern minds crept over me, and mingled with the repulsion that I felt. I looked furtively at his withered, dried-up features. He wore some vague and shadowy impress still of what had just been in him. There was a stony appearance in his shrunken cheeks. He looked smaller. I saw him lessened. I thought of him as he had been so short a time before, imprisoned in his great stone captors that had obsessed him....

'There's tremendous power in it,—an awful power,' I stammered, more to break the oppressive pause than for any desire in me to speak with him. 'It brings back Egypt in some extraordinary way—ancient Egypt, I mean—brings it close—into the heart.' My words ran on of their own accord almost. I spoke with a hush, unwittingly. There was awe in me. Isley had moved away towards the window, leaving me face to face with this strange incarnation of another age.

'It must,' he replied, deep light still glowing in his eyes, 'for the soul of the old days is in it. No one, I think, can hear it and remain the

same. It expresses, you see, the essential passion and beauty of that gorgeous worship, that splendid faith, that reasonable and intelligent worship of the sun, the only scientific belief the world has ever known. Its popular form, of course, was largely superstitious, but the sacerdotal form—the form used by the priests, that is—who understood the relationship between color, sound and symbol, was ——'

He broke off suddenly, as though he had been speaking to himself. We sat down. George Isley leaned out of the window with his back to us, watching the desert in the moonless night.

'You have tried its effect before upon—others?' I asked point-blank.

'Upon myself,' he answered shortly.

'Upon others?' I insisted.

He hesitated an instant.

'Upon one other—yes,' he admitted.

'Intentionally?' And something quivered in me as I asked it.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. 'I'm merely a speculative archaeologist,' he smiled, 'and—and an imaginative Egyptologist. My bounden duty is to reconstruct the past so that it lives for others.'

An impulse rose in me to take him by the throat.

'You know perfectly well, of course, the magical effect it's sure—likely at least—to have?'

He stared steadily at me through the cigarette smoke. To this day I cannot think exactly what it was in this man that made me shudder.

'I'm sure of nothing,' he replied smoothly, 'but I consider it quite legitimate to try. Magical—the word you used—has no meaning for me. If such a thing exists, it is merely scientific—undiscovered or forgotten knowledge.' An insolent, aggressive light shone in his eyes as he spoke; his manner was almost truculent. 'You refer, I take it, to —our friend—rather than to yourself?'

And with difficulty I met his singular stare. From his whole person something still emanated that was forbidding, yet overmasteringly persuasive. It brought back the notion of that invisible Web, that dim gauze curtain, that motionless Influence lying waiting at the center for

its prey, those monstrous and mysterious Items standing, alert and watchful, through the centuries. ‘You mean,’ he added lower, ‘his altered attitude to life—his going?’

To hear him use the words, the very phrase, struck me with sudden chill. Before I could answer, however, and certainly before I could master the touch of horror that rushed over me, I heard him continuing in a whisper. It seemed again that he spoke to himself as much as he spoke to me.

‘The soul, I suppose, has the right to choose its own conditions and surroundings. To pass elsewhere involves translation, not extinction.’ He smoked a moment in silence, then said another curious thing, looking up into my face with an expression of intense earnestness. Something genuine in him again replaced the pose of cynicism. ‘The soul is eternal and can take its place anywhere, regardless of mere duration. What is there in the vulgar and superficial Present that should hold it so exclusively; and where can it find to-day the belief, the faith, the beauty that are the very essence of its life—where in the rush and scatter of this tawdry age can it make its home? Shall it flutter for ever in a valley of dry bones, when a living Past lies ready and waiting with loveliness, strength, and glory?’ He moved closer; he touched my arm; I felt his breath upon my face. ‘Come with us,’ he whispered awfully; ‘come back with us! Withdraw your life from the rubbish of this futile ugliness! Come back and worship with us in the spirit of the Past. Take up the old, old splendor, the glory, the immense conceptions, the wondrous certainty, the ineffable knowledge of essentials. It all lies about you still; it’s calling, ever calling; it’s very close; it draws you day and night—calling, calling, calling....’

His voice died off curiously into distance on the word; I can hear it to this day, and the soft, droning quality in the intense yet fading tone: ‘Calling, calling, calling.’ But his eyes turned wicked. I felt the sinister power of the man. I was aware of madness in his thought and mind. The Past he sought to glorify I saw black, as with the forbidding Egyptian darkness of a plague. It was not beauty but Death that I heard calling, calling, calling.

‘It’s real,’ he went on, hardly aware that I shrank, ‘and not a dream. These ruined symbols still remain in touch with that which was. They are potent to-day as they were six thousand years ago. The amazing

life of those days brims behind them. They are not mere masses of oppressive stone; they express in visible form great powers that still are—*knowable*.' He lowered his head, peered up into my face, and whispered. Something secret passed into his eyes.

'I saw you change,' came the words below his breath, 'as you saw the change in us. But only worship can produce that change. The soul assumes the qualities of the deity it worships. The powers of its deity possess it and transform it into its own likeness. You also felt it. *You* also were possessed. I saw the stone-faced deity upon your own.'

I seemed to shake myself as a dog shakes water from its body. I stood up. I remember that I stretched my hands out as though to push him from me and expel some creeping influence from my mind. I remember another thing as well. But for the reality of the sequel, and but for the matter-of-fact result still facing me to-day in the disappearance of George Isley—the loss to the present time of all George Isley *was*—I might have found subject for laughter in what I saw. Comedy was in it certainly. Yet it was both ghastly and terrific. Deep horror crept below the aspect of the ludicrous, for the apparent mimicry cloaked truth. It was appalling because it was real.

In the large mirror that reflected the room behind me I saw myself and Moleson; I saw Isley too in the background by the open window. And the attitude of all three was the attitude of hieroglyphics come to life. My arms indeed were stretched, but not stretched, as I had thought, in mere self-defense. They were stretched—unnaturally. The forearms made those strange obtuse angles that the old carved granite wears, the palms of the hands held upwards, the heads thrown back, the legs advanced, the bodies stiffened into postures that expressed forgotten, ancient minds. The physical conformation of all three was monstrous; and yet reverence and truth dictated even the uncouthness of the gestures. Something in all three of us inspired the forms our bodies had assumed. Our attitudes expressed buried yearnings, emotions, tendencies—whatever they may be termed—that the spirit of the Past evoked.

I saw the reflected picture but for a moment. I dropped my arms, aware of foolishness in my way of standing. Moleson moved forward with his long, significant stride, and at the same instant Isley came up quickly and joined us from his place by the open window. We looked into each other's faces without a word. There was this little pause that

lasted perhaps ten seconds. But in that pause I felt the entire world slide past me. I heard the centuries rush by at headlong speed. The present dipped away. Existence was no longer in a line that stretched two ways; it was a circle in which ourselves, together with Past and Future, stood motionless at the center, all details equally accessible at once. The three of us were falling, falling backwards....

'Come!' said the voice of Moleson solemnly, but with the sweetness as of a child anticipating joy. 'Come! Let us go together, for the boat of Ra has crossed the Underworld. The darkness has been conquered. Let us go out together and find the dawn. Listen! It is calling, calling, calling....'

XIII

I was aware of rushing, but it was the soul in me that rushed. It experienced dizzy, unutterable alterations. Thousands of emotions, intense and varied, poured through me at lightning speed, each satisfyingly known, yet gone before its name appeared. The life of many centuries tore headlong back with me, and, as in drowning, this epitome of existence shot in a few seconds the steep slopes the Past had so laboriously built up. The changes flashed and passed. I wept and prayed and worshiped; I loved and suffered; I battled, lost and won. Down the gigantic scale of ages that telescoped thus into a few brief moments, the soul in me went sliding backwards towards a motionless, reposeful Past.

I remember foolish details that interrupted the immense descent—I put on coat and hat; I remember some one's words, strangely sounding as when some bird wakes up and sings at midnight—'We'll take the little door; the front one's locked by now'; and I have a vague recollection of the outline of the great hotel, with its colonnades and terraces, fading behind me through the air. But these details merely flickered and disappeared, as though I fell earthwards from a star and passed feathers or blown leaves upon the way. There was no friction as my soul dropped backwards into time; the flight was easy and silent as a dream. I felt myself sucked down into gulfs whose emptiness offered no resistance ... until at last the appalling speed decreased of its own accord, and the dizzy flight became a kind of gentle floating. It changed imperceptibly into a gliding motion, as though the angle altered. My feet, quite naturally, were on the ground, moving through something soft that clung to them and rustled while it clung.

I looked up and saw the bright armies of the stars. In front of me I recognized the flat-topped, shadowy ridges; on both sides lay the open expanses of familiar wilderness; and beside me, one on either hand, moved two figures who were my companions. We were in the desert, but it was the desert of thousands of years ago. My companions,

moreover, though familiar to some part of me, seemed strangers or half known. Their names I strove in vain to capture; Mosely, Ilson, sounded in my head, mingled together falsely. And when I stole a glance at them, I saw dark lines of mannikins unfilled with substance, and was aware of the grotesque gestures of living hieroglyphics. It seemed for an instant that their arms were bound behind their backs impossibly, and that their heads turned sharply across their lineal shoulders.

But for a moment only; for at a second glance I saw them solid and compact; their names came back to me; our arms were linked together as we walked. We had already covered a great distance, for my limbs were aching and my breath was short. The air was cold, the silence absolute. It seemed, in this faint light, that the desert flowed beneath our feet, rather than that we advanced by taking steps. Cliffs with hooded tops moved past us, boulders glided, mounds of sand slid by. And then I heard a voice upon my left that was surely Moleson speaking:

'Towards Enet our feet are set,' he half sang, half murmured, 'towards Enet-te-ntōrē. There, in the House of Birth, we shall dedicate our hearts and lives anew.'

And the language, no less than the musical intonation of his voice, enraptured me. For I understood he spoke of Denderah, in whose majestic temple recent hands had painted with deathless colors the symbols of our cosmic relationships with the zodiacal signs. And Denderah was our great seat of worship of the goddess Hathor, the Egyptian Aphrodite, bringer of love and joy. The falcon-headed Horus was her husband, from whom, in his home at Edfu, we imbibed swift kinds of power. And—it was the time of the New Year, the great feast when the forces of the living earth turn upwards into happy growth.

We were on foot across the desert towards Denderah, and this sand we trod was the sand of thousands of years ago.

The paralysis of time and distance involved some amazing lightness of the spirit that, I suppose, touched ecstasy. There was intoxication in the soul. I was not divided from the stars, nor separate from this desert that rushed with us. The unhampered wind blew freshly from my nerves and skin, and the Nile, glimmering faintly on our right, lay with its lapping waves in both my hands. I knew the life of Egypt, for it was in me, over me, round me. I was a part of it. We went happily,

like birds to meet the sunrise. There were no pits of measured time and interval that could detain us. We flowed, yet were at rest; we were endlessly alive; present and future alike were inconceivable; we were in the Kingdom of the Past.

The Pyramids were just a-building, and the army of Obelisks looked about them, proud of their first balance; Thebes swung her hundred gates upon the world. New, shining Memphis glittered with myriad reflections into waters that the tears of Isis sweetened, and the cliffs of Abou Simbel were still innocent of their gigantic progeny. Alone, the Sphinx, linking timelessness with time, brooded unguessed and underived upon an alien world. We marched within antiquity towards Denderah....

How long we marched, how fast, how far we went, I can remember as little as the marvelous speech that passed across me while my two companions spoke together. I only remember that suddenly a wave of pain disturbed my wondrous happiness and caused my calm, which had seemed beyond all reach of break, to fall away. I heard their voices abruptly with a kind of terror. A sensation of fear, of loss, of nightmare bewilderment came over me like cold wind. What *they* lived naturally, true to their inmost hearts, *I* lived merely by means of a temperamental sympathy. And the stage had come at which my powers failed. Exhaustion overtook me. I wilted. The strain—the abnormal backwards stretch of consciousness that was put upon me by another—gave way and broke. I heard their voices faint and horrible. My joy was extinguished. A glare of horror fell upon the desert and the stars seemed evil. An anguishing desire for the safe and wholesome Present usurped all this mad yearning to obtain the Past. My feet fell out of step. The rushing of the desert paused. I unlinked my arms. We stopped all three.

The actual spot is to this day well known to me. I found it afterwards, I even photographed it. It lies actually not far from Helouan—a few miles at most beyond the Solitary Palm, where slopes of undulating sand mark the opening of a strange, enticing valley called the Wadi Gerraui. And it is enticing because it beckons and leads on. Here, amid torn gorges of a limestone wilderness, there is suddenly soft yellow sand that flows and draws the feet onward. It slips away with one too easily; always the next ridge and basin must be seen, each time a little farther. It has the quality of decoying. The cliffs say, No; but this streaming sand invites. In its flowing curves of

gold there is enchantment.

And it was here upon its very lips we stopped, the rhythm of our steps broken, our hearts no longer one. My temporary rapture vanished. I was aware of fear. For the Present rushed upon me with attack in it, and I felt that my mind was arrested close upon the edge of madness. Something cleared and lifted in my brain.

The soul, indeed, could 'choose its dwelling-place'; but to live elsewhere completely was the choice of madness, and to live divorced from all the sweet wholesome business of To-day involved an exile that was worse than madness. It was death. My heart burned for George Isley. I remembered the tear upon his cheek. The agony of his struggle I shared suddenly with him. Yet with him was the reality, with me a sympathetic reflection merely. *He* was already too far gone to fight....

I shall never forget the desolation of that strange scene beneath the morning stars. The desert lay down and watched us. We stood upon the brink of a little broken ridge, looking into the valley of golden sand. This sand gleamed soft and wonderful in the starlight some twenty feet below. The descent was easy—but I would not move. I refused to advance another step. I saw my companions in the mysterious half-light beside me peering over the edge, Moleson in front a little.

And I turned to him, sure of the part I meant to play, yet conscious painfully of my helplessness. My personality seemed a straw in mid-stream that spun in a futile effort to arrest the flood that bore it. There was vivid human conflict in the moment's silence. It was an eddy that paused in the great body of the tide. And then I spoke. Oh, I was ashamed of the insignificance of my voice and the weakness of my little personality.

'Moleson, we go no farther with you. We have already come too far. We now turn back.'

Behind my words were a paltry thirty years. His answer drove sixty centuries against me. For his voice was like the wind that passed whispering down the stream of yellow sand below us. He smiled.

'Our feet are set towards Enet-te-ntōrē. There is no turning back. Listen! It is calling, calling, calling!'

'We will go home,' I cried, in a tone I vainly strove to make

imperative.

‘Our home is there,’ he sang, pointing with one long thin arm towards the brightening east, ‘for the Temple calls us and the River takes our feet. We shall be in the House of Birth to meet the sunrise ——’

‘You lie,’ I cried again, ‘you speak the lies of madness, and this Past you seek is the House of Death. It is the kingdom of the underworld.’

The words tore wildly, impotently out of me. I seized George Isley’s arm.

‘Come back with me,’ I pleaded vehemently, my heart aching with a nameless pain for him. ‘We’ll retrace our steps. Come home with me! Come back! Listen! The Present calls you sweetly!’

His arm slipped horribly out of my grasp that had seemed to hold it so tightly. Moleson, already below us in the yellow sand, looked small with distance. He was gliding rapidly farther with uncanny swiftness. The diminution of his form was ghastly. It was like a doll’s. And his voice rose up, faint as with the distance of great gulfs of space.

‘Calling ... calling.... You hear it for ever calling ...’

It died away with the wind along that sandy valley, and the Past swept in a flood across the brightening sky. I swayed as though a storm was at my back. I reeled. Almost I went too—over the crumbling edge into the sand.

‘Come back with me! Come home!’ I cried more faintly. ‘The Present alone is real. There is work, ambition, duty. There is beauty too—the beauty of good living! And there is love! There is—a woman ... calling, calling...!’

That other voice took up the word below me. I heard the faint refrain sing down the sandy walls. The wild, sweet pang in it was marvelous.

‘Our feet are set for Enet-te-ntōrē. It is calling, calling...!’

My voice fell into nothingness. George Isley was below me now, his outline tiny against the sheet of yellow sand. And the sand was moving. The desert rushed again. The human figures receded swiftly into the Past they had reconstructed with the creative yearning of their souls.

I stood alone upon the edge of crumbling limestone, helplessly watching them. It was amazing what I witnessed, while the shafts of crimson dawn rose up the sky. The enormous desert turned alive to the horizon with gold and blue and silver. The purple shadows melted into grey. The flat-topped ridges shone. Huge messengers of light flashed everywhere at once. The radiance of sunrise dazzled my outer sight.

But if my eyes were blinded, my inner sight was focused the more clearly upon what followed. I witnessed the disappearance of George Isley. There was a dreadful magic in the picture. The pair of them, small and distant below me in that little sandy hollow, stood out sharply defined as in a miniature. I saw their outlines neat and terrible like some ghastly inset against the enormous scenery. Though so close to me in actual space, they were centuries away in time. And a dim, vast shadow was about them that was not mere shadow of the ridges. It encompassed them; it moved, crawling over the sand, obliterating them. Within it, like insects lost in amber, they became visibly imprisoned, dwindled in size, borne deep away, absorbed.

And then I recognized the outline. Once more, but this time recumbent and spread flat upon the desert's face, I knew the monstrous shapes of the twin obsessing symbols. The spirit of ancient Egypt lay over all the land, tremendous in the dawn. The sunrise summoned her. She lay prostrate before the deity. The shadows of the towering Colossi lay prostrate too. The little humans, with their worshiping and conquered hearts, lay deep within them.

George Isley I saw clearest. The distinctness, the reality were appalling. He was naked, robbed, undressed. I saw him a skeleton, picked clean to the very bones as by an acid. His life lay hid in the being of that mighty Past. Egypt had absorbed him. He was gone....

I closed my eyes, but I could not keep them closed. They opened of their own accord. The three of us were nearing the great hotel that rose yellow, with shuttered windows, in the early sunshine. A wind blew briskly from the north across the Mokattam Hills. There were soft cannon-ball clouds dotted about the sky, and across the Nile, where the mist lay in a line of white, I saw the tops of the Pyramids gleaming like mountain peaks of gold. A string of camels, laden with white stone, went past us. I heard the crying of the natives in the streets of Helouan, and as we went up the steps the donkeys arrived

and camped in the sandy road beside their *bersim* till the tourists claimed them.

'Good morning,' cried Abdullah, the man who owned them. 'You all go Sakkhâra to-day, or Memphis? Beat'ful day to-day, and vair good donkeys!'

Moleson went up to his room without a word, and Isley did the same. I thought he staggered a moment as he turned the passage corner from my sight. His face wore a look of vacancy that some call peace. There was radiance in it. It made me shudder. Aching in mind and body, and no word spoken, I followed their example. I went upstairs to bed, and slept a dreamless sleep till after sunset....

XIV

And I woke with a lost, unhappy feeling that a withdrawing tide had left me on the shore, alone and desolate. My first instinct was for my friend, George Isley. And I noticed a square, white envelope with my name upon it in his writing.

Before I opened it I knew quite well what words would be inside:

'We are going up to Thebes,' the note informed me simply. 'We leave by the night train. If you care to——' But the last four words were scratched out again, though not so thickly that I could not read them. Then came the address of the Egyptologist's house and the signature, very firmly traced, 'Yours ever, GEORGE ISLEY.' I glanced at my watch and saw that it was after seven o'clock. The night train left at half-past six. They had already started....

The pain of feeling forsaken, left behind, was deep and bitter, for myself; but what I felt for him, old friend and comrade, was even more intense, since it was hopeless. Fear and conventional emotion had stopped me at the very gates of an amazing possibility—some state of consciousness that, *realizing* the Past, might doff the Present, and by slipping out of Time, experience Eternity. That was the seduction I had escaped by the uninspired resistance of my pettier soul. Yet, he, my friend, yielding in order to conquer, had obtained an awful prize—ah, I understood the picture's other side as well, with an unutterable poignancy of pity—the prize of immobility which is sheer stagnation, the imagined bliss which is a false escape, the dream of finding beauty away from present things. From that dream the awakening must be rude indeed. Clutching at vanished stars, he had clutched the oldest illusion in the world. To me it seemed the negation of life that had betrayed him. The pity of it burned me like a flame.

But I did not 'care to follow' him and his companion. I waited at Helouan for his return, filling the empty days with yet emptier explanations. I felt as a man who sees what he loves sinking down into clear, deep water, still within visible reach, yet gone beyond

recovery. Moleson had taken him back to Thebes; and Egypt, monstrous effigy of the Past, had caught her prey.

The rest, moreover, is easily told. Moleson I never saw again. To this day I have never seen him, though his subsequent books are known to me, with the banal fact that he is numbered with those energetic and deluded enthusiasts who start a new religion, obtain notoriety, a few hysterical followers and—oblivion.

George Isley, however, returned to Helouan after a fortnight's absence. I saw him, knew him, talked and had my meals with him. We even did slight expeditions together. He was gentle and delightful as a woman who has loved a wonderful ideal and attained to it—in memory. All roughness was gone out of him; he was smooth and polished as a crystal surface that reflects whatever is near enough to ask a picture. Yet his appearance shocked me inexpressibly: there was nothing in him—*nothing*. It was the representation of George Isley that came back from Thebes; the outer simulacra; the shell that walks the London streets to-day. I met no vestige of the man I used to know. George Isley had disappeared.

With this marvelous automaton I lived another month. The horror of him kept me company in the hotel where he moved among the cosmopolitan humanity as a ghost that visits the sunlight yet has its home elsewhere.

This empty image of George Isley lived with me in our Helouan hotel until the winds of early March informed his physical frame that discomfort was in the air, and that he might as well move elsewhere—elsewhere happening to be northwards.

And he left just as he stayed—automatically. His brain obeyed the conventional stimuli to which his nerves, and consequently his muscles, were accustomed. It sounds so foolish. But he took his ticket automatically; he gave the natural and adequate reasons automatically; he chose his ship and landing-place in the same way that ordinary people chose these things; he said good-bye like any other man who leaves casual acquaintances and 'hopes' to meet them again; he lived, that is to say, entirely in his brain. His heart, his emotions, his temperament and personality, that nameless sum-total for which the great sympathetic nervous system is accountable—all this, his soul, had gone elsewhere. This once vigorous, gifted being had become a normal, comfortable man that everybody could

understand—a commonplace nonentity. He was precisely what the majority expected him to be—ordinary; a good fellow; a man of the world; he was 'delightful.' He merely reflected daily life without partaking of it. To the majority it was hardly noticeable; 'very pleasant' was a general verdict. His ambition, his restlessness, his zeal had gone; that tireless zest whose driving power is yearning had taken flight, leaving behind it physical energy without spiritual desire. His soul had found its nest and flown to it. He lived in the chimera of the Past, serene, indifferent, detached. I saw him immense, a shadowy, majestic figure, standing—ah, not moving!—in a repose that was satisfying because it *could* not change. The size, the mystery, the immobility that caged him in seemed to me—terrible. For I dared not intrude upon his awful privacy, and intimacy between us there was none. Of his experiences at Thebes I asked no single question—it was somehow not possible or legitimate; he, equally, vouchsafed no word of explanation—it was uncommunicable to a dweller in the Present. Between us was this barrier we both respected. He peered at modern life, incurious, listless, apathetic, through a dim, gauze curtain. He was behind it.

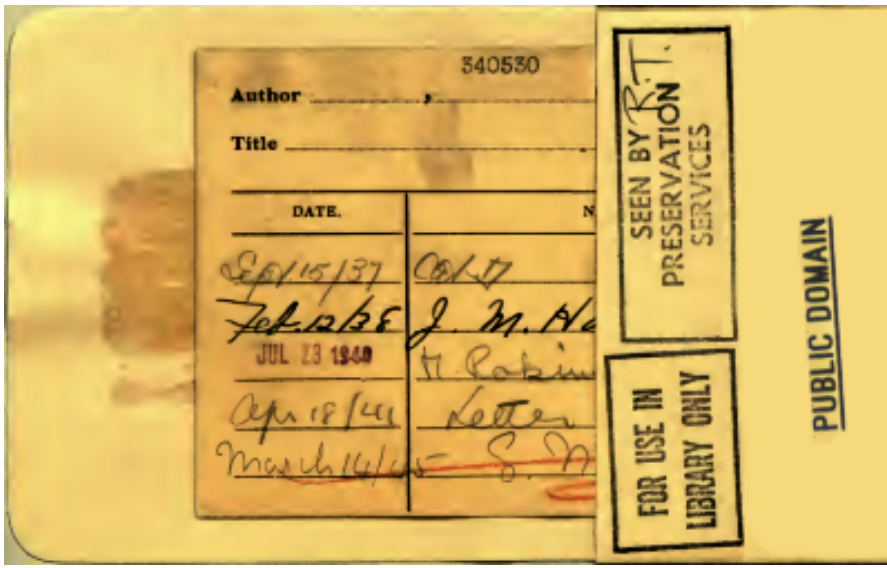
People round us were going to Sakkhâra and the Pyramids, to see the Sphinx by moonlight, to dream at Edfu and at Denderah. Others described their journeys to Assouan, Khartoum and Abou Simbel, and gave details of their encampments in the desert. Wind, wind, wind! The winds of Egypt blew and sang and sighed. From the White Nile came the travelers, and from the Blue Nile, from the Fayum, and from nameless excavations without end. They talked and wrote their books. They had the magpie knowledge of the present. The Egyptologists, big and little, read the writing on the wall and put the hieroglyphs and papyri into modern language. Alone George Isley *knew* the secret. He lived it.

And the high passionate calm, the lofty beauty, the glamor and enchantment that are the spell of this thrice-haunted land, were in *my* soul as well—sufficiently for me to interpret his condition. I could not leave, yet having left I could not stay away. I yearned for the Egypt that he knew. No word I uttered; speech could not approach it. We wandered by the Nile together, and through the groves of palms that once were Memphis. The sandy wastes beyond the Pyramids knew our footsteps; the Mokattam Ridges, purple at evening and golden in the dawn, held our passing shadows as we silently went by. At no single

dawn or sunset was he to be found indoors, and it became my habit to accompany him—the joy of worship in his soul was marvelous. The great, still skies of Egypt watched us, the hanging stars, the gigantic dome of blue; we felt together that burning southern wind; the golden sweetness of the sun lay in our blood as we saw the great boats take the northern breeze upstream. Immensity was everywhere and this golden magic of the sun....

But it was in the Desert especially, where only sun and wind observe the faint signaling of Time, where space is nothing because it is not divided, and where no detail reminds the heart that the world is called To-Day—it was in the desert this curtain hung most visibly between us, he on that side, I on this. It was transparent. He was with a multitude no man can number. Towering to the moon, yet spreading backwards towards his burning source of life, drawn out by the sun and by the crystal air into some vast interior magnitude, the spirit of George Isley hung beside me, close yet far away, in the haze of olden days.

And, sometimes, he moved. I was aware of gestures. His head was raised to listen. One arm swung shadowy across the sea of broken ridges. From leagues away a line of sand rose slowly. There was a rustling. Another—an enormous—arm emerged to meet his own, and two stupendous figures drew together. Poised above Time, yet throned upon the centuries, They knew eternity. So easily they remained possessors of the land. Facing the east, they waited for the dawn. And their marvelously forgotten singing poured across the world....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